



The
BOY SCOUTS
and the
ARMY AIRSHIP
LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON





"IT'S NOW OR NEVER," THOUGHT ROB. WITH EVERY EFFORT HE COULD MUSTER, THE LAD LAUNCHED HIS HARPOON.

—Page 28

THE
BOY SCOUTS AND
THE ARMY
AIR-SHIP

BY

LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

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NEW YORK
HURST & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship

CHAPTER I.

SEA SCOUTS AT PLAY.

"Go!"

Commodore Wingate of the Hampton Yacht Club gave the word in a sharp, tense voice. The pistol he held extended above his head cracked sharply. The crowds massed upon the clubhouse verandas and in the vicinity broke into hoarse cheers as the tension of waiting was relieved.

"There they go!" came the cry.

Before the puff of blue smoke from the discharged pistol had been wafted away by a light breeze, two eighteen-foot, double-ended whaleboats shot out from either side of the float. For

ten minutes or more they had been teetering there, like leashed grayhounds. This was while the final words of instruction were being given. Now the suspense of the preliminaries was over, and the "Spearing the Sturgeon" contest, between the Hawk and Eagle Patrols of Hampton, was on.

Bow and bow the two white craft hissed over the sparkling, blue waters of the inlet. From the clubhouse porch, from the beach, from the sand dunes of the farther side of the Inlet, and from the row of automobiles parked along the beach—which had come from all parts of Long Island—the strivers were cheered.

The afternoon's program of exciting water sports, arranged by the Scoutmasters of the rival patrols, was now reaching its climax. The packed yacht club and automobile crowds ashore had never seen anything like it before. Among them was our old friend of the first volume of this series—"The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol"—namely, Captain Job Hudgins.

"It's the beatingest I ever seed afloat or ashore,

douse my toplights if it ain't," the captain was loudly declaring to a group of cronies.

"Them Bye Scouts did wonders in the west, they tell me," commented Si Stebbins, the postmaster and village store-keeper. "In my day, though, a bye had ter work an' not go foolin' aroun' in er uniform like them Scouts."

"What air yer talkin' about?" put in another voice. "Them Boy Scouts is a good thing fer this town. Didn't ther newspapers hev all erbout how they beat out a band of cattle rustlers and Injuns in ther west, an' most got killed doin' it?"

"They'd hev bin a sight better ter hum minding their own bizness," opined Jeb Trotter, a village character, but there were few who had watched the exciting afternoon of healthy, wholesome water sports who agreed with him.

As the readers of the "Boy Scouts on the Range" may recollect, it was mentioned in that book that, during Leader Rob's absence on a friend's ranch in the west, another patrol—namely, the Hawk—had been formed. On his return, as was natural, the lads of the Eagle had

besieged him with proposals to try conclusions with the Hawks. Finally, under Scoutmaster Blake with Wingate's supervision, a program had been arranged. It included a game of water polo, tub races, a greased pole competition, a race between small cat-boats, and, as a grand wind-up feature, the exciting "Spearing the Sturgeon" game.

Honors were even up to the moment that the two boats dashed away from the float. The laurels of the afternoon would go to the victorious crew. No wonder a cheer went up as the double-enders skimmed over the sparkling water toward a dark object, about six feet in length, near which a canoe, containing the referee, Bartley Holmes, hovered.

The dark object was "the sturgeon." It was formed of soft wood, and had two realistic eyes painted on the thicker part of its body. It really did look something like a sturgeon, as it lay bobbing about on the water. At the bow of each boat stood a lithe young figure in bathing togs. Each held poised above his head a keen, pointed

harpoon. The eyes of both of the spearsmen were riveted, as their crews urged their boats forward, upon the sturgeon's dark outline.

In the stern of each boat, from which fluttered flags bearing their patrol figures in proper colorings, was poised a steersman, holding a single oar. In the Eagles' boat the helmsman was Merritt Crawford. In the Hawks' craft the position was held by a lad named Dale Harding. Skillfully each coxswain directed his flying craft to a point of vantage from which their spearsman could hurl his harpoon to the most effective purpose.

The young harpooners stood tense and rigid as pieces of statuary, every sinew and muscle in their bodies ready for the first "strike." The Eagles' harpooner, Rob Blake, the leader of that patrol, was perhaps a little smaller in girth and height than Freeman Hunt, the harpooner and leader of the Hawks, but what Rob lacked in "beef," he made up in sinuous activity. The fall sun glinted on his tough, brown flesh, as if it had

been bronze. "Hard as nails" you would have said if you could have looked him over.

As the green and black "Eagle" standard, and the pink "Hawk" flag began to close in from their different points of the compass, a sharp cry went up from the onlookers.

"K-r-ee-ee-ee-ee!" shrilled the patrol cry of the Eagles from veranda, dune and beach.

Then a breathless hush fell as they waited for the first strike. The referee, in his dark-green canoe, dodged about as actively as a water bug, watching every move closely.

The crews were made up as follows:

EAGLES.

HAWKS.

Spearsman,

Spearsman,

Rob Blake.

Freeman Hunt.

Helmsman,

Helmsman,

Merritt Crawford.

Dale Harding.

Oars:

Oars:

Stroke, Tubby Hopkins. Stroke, Lem Lonsdale.

No. 1, Ernest Thompson. No. 1, Fred Ingalls.

No. 2, Hiram Nelson. No. 2, Grover Bell.

No. 3, Paul Perkins. No. 3, Phil Speed.

A deep-throated roar went up from the shore as Rob Blake's harpoon glinted in the sunlight and sank quivering into the soft wood of the sturgeon. Instantly Merritt Crawford swung on his oar, bringing the bow of the boat round. But as he did so, there came another flash, and Freeman Hunt's harpoon sank deep into the quarry, not six inches from Rob's spear.

"Pull, you Eagles!" came a wild shout from shoreward.

"Now then, Hawks!" roared back the rival contingent.

Both crews were backing water for all they were worth, each seeking to draw the other's harpoon out of the "sturgeon." The harpoons were not barbed, which might have made them dangerous, and a determined pull would be likely to dislodge one.

"Give them rope!" shouted Merritt from the stern of the Eagles' boat, and Rob, as the Hawks started to pull away, paid out his harpoon line rapidly. This maneuver rested his men while it saved his spear from being damaged. The

Hawks, on the other hand, were straining their backs with feverish energy. They fairly dripped as they bent to their oars.

"Now then, come ahead easy!" ordered Rob, and the Eagles' boat began to creep up.

But still the two harpoons stood upright in the "flesh" of the wooden game. Bartley Holmes came scudding up in his canoe.

"Carefully now, boys! Carefully!" he urged, watching things narrowly.

"They're trying to work up into their base!" shouted Merritt suddenly, as the boats neared the shore.

"Working into their base" meant that the opposing crew would try to land the "fish" at their starting point. In such case, the first heat would go to them, even if the Eagles' spear was sticking in the sturgeon at the time.

"Back water!" cried Rob suddenly.

The lad, crouching over the water, had been watching every move of his opponents anxiously. He detected signs of weakening in the crew of the Hawks, and gave the signal to reverse the

motion of his boat as the Hawks slacked up ever so little.

The line zanged up out of the water, dripping and taut, as Rob's crew obeyed the sharp order.

As it did so, there was a cry of dismay from the Hawk supporters, when they beheld Freeman Hunt's spear, which had not sunk as deep as Rob's, jerked out of the "fish." Hunt gritted his teeth angrily. He was not a boy who relished defeat at any game, and the yells of the Eagle adherents enraged him.

"Get after them, you dubs!" he bellowed, as the Eagle boat darted off, towing the captured sturgeon behind them.

It was Hunt's object to overtake them and spear the "fish" again. In this case a fresh struggle, in which he might prove victorious, would ensue.

Everybody was now on the tiptoe of excitement. It was a race for the Eagles' base. With Rob's muscular young crew bending to their oars with the regularity of machine-driven mechanism, the boat bearing the green and black stand-

ard fairly hissed through the water. Behind her there towed clumsily the black form of the captured sturgeon.

"More steam! More steam!" shouted Hunt, dancing up and down in the bow of the craft, as the Hawk Patrol boys gave way with all their power. But pull as they would, they were no match for the Eagles, who had rested while they were needlessly exerting their strength.

"Eagles!"

"K-r-ee-ee-ee-ee-ee!"

"Go on, Hawks!"

"Don't give up!"

"Pull, boys! PULL!"

The yells came now in one continuous roar, but they did not affect the result of the first heat at all.

Bang!

The starter's pistol cracked once more as the Eagles' whaler, with the sturgeon in tow, shot across the line. But as she did so, Freeman Hunt made a desperate effort, and by some fluke—for the distance between the boats must have been

'twenty feet,—succeeded in landing his spear in the sturgeon's tail.

"Back water! Back water!" Dale Harding began yelling, working his steering oar about.

"Too late," laughed back Rob good-naturedly.

"Try again next heat."

"What do you mean?" shouted Hunt angrily.

"My harpoon is in."

"Yes, but we had crossed the line as you cast it," yelled back Merritt.

An immediate appeal to Commodore Wingate followed, the referee being hopelessly outdistanced in that wild dash for the float.

"Silence!" he shouted above the confusion of excited boyish voices. Instantly there was a hush, only broken by some excited supporter of the Hawks having it out with an equally heated adherent of the Eagles.

"My decision is that the Eagles win the first heat," announced Mr. Wingate. "The sturgeon was across the base line before the Hawks harpooned it."

Instantly Bedlam broke loose.

"He's right."

"He isn't."

"I saw it myself."

"Well, you ought to have your eyes seen to."

These, and a hundred other argumentative remarks, filled the air, but, of course, like most such outbursts, they had no effect on the referee's decision. There was a glowering, angry look on Freeman Hunt's face, though, as the two boats changed bases for the next heat.

"We'll get you this trip," he grated, as the Eagle's boat scraped past his craft.

"Say, Hunt, you're an awful bad loser," piped up the corpulent Tubby, winking at the others.

"Oh, I am, am I, you tub of lard. Just you wait. We'll show you. You may have got that heat by a technical decision, but we'll beat you fair and square this time."

"Well, we're both here to try just that," Rob reminded the angry boy, as the boats bumped and passed.

"The second of the three heats is now on!" bel-
lowed the announcer through his megaphone.

"Are you ready?" demanded Mr. Wingate, as the occupants of both boats anxiously awaited the signal.

"All right here," announced Freeman Hunt, on whose face an angry light still showed.

"Go ahead, sir," cried Rob.

The pistol cracked, and the two boats darted forth once more, now on the second lap of their intense struggle for supremacy.

CHAPTER II.

THE SPEARING OF THE STURGEON.

THERE were to be three heats in the contest. One having already gone to the Eagles, it behooved the Hawks to exert themselves to the uttermost to even matters up. The short rest at the float had done them good. During the breathing spell, the sturgeon had once more been towed out by Bartley Holmes, and now lay bobbing temptingly, awaiting the young harpooners. Freeman Hunt's crew, rowing with unwise desperation, were the first at the mark this time. The "sturgeon" gave an awkward wallow and vanished from view for a breath, as Hunt's harpoon flashed through the air and sank deep into it. An encouraging cheer went up from the shore. Hunt grinned confidently, as Dale Harding ordered his rowers to speed off with their prey.

But Rob's boat was almost upon the sturgeon

as Hunt's harpoon sank into it. Tautening every muscle the boy hurtled his weapon, less than a second later. But the steel point, instead of sinking in, merely grazed the bobbing, yielding object, and shot into the water with a splash.

"W-e-l-l!"

An ironical groan came from the Hawks' supporters ashore. The success of the Pink Bird's patrol encouraged them.

"What did I tell you!" shouted Hunt triumphantly, as Rob, without any expression of anger or chagrin crossing his features, proceeded to haul in his harpoon.

Rob made no reply. Instead he turned to Merritt.

"All the ginger you can, old man," he said quietly, as the Hawks' boat dashed off at top speed, towing the captured sturgeon behind them. Already they were two or three boat lengths ahead of the Eagles.

"Fathom! Fathom!" shouted Rob suddenly.

His keen eyes had noticed that the Hawks' boat had not paid out line to the fathom mark,

which was indicated by a bit of red rag tied in the harpoon rope. Instead, they were towing their quarry quite close to their stern.

"It's out!" shouted back Dale Harding, a flash of defiance in his eye, but the referee's voice cut in.

"Fathom there! Pay out your line!" he ordered sharply.

Rather sulkily Dale obeyed. This gave Rob another chance. Poising himself carefully, he threw once more. This time his cast landed in the wooden back, but the distance was so great that much of the force of the cast was lost. The steel point of the harpoon hung quivering in not more than an inch of wood.

"Yah-h-h-h-h!" yelled the Hawkites disgustingly.

"Good for you, Blake!" came a roar from the Eagle supporters.

"A spurt. Pull, you beggars!" yelled Dale suddenly.

The Hawks' craft shot forward. Dale's sharp eyes had seen that Rob's spear had only lodged

lightly in the "fish," whereas Hunt's harpoon was firmly embedded. The move was successful. As the lines tautened, Rob's harpoon point was jerked out of the "sturgeon." With a shout, the Hawks shot forward for their float.

"W-e-l-l!" yelled the Hawks' crowd ashore, in further ironical astonishment.

"Hard luck!" encouraged Merritt from the stern, as Rob hauled in. "Try again."

"All right, if you fellows will put me alongside. I guess all my fingers have turned to thumbs," rejoined Rob. Not a trace of anger over his failure to spear the fish revealed itself. He seemed as sunny and good-natured as ever.

The Eagles gave way with a will. They would need every ounce of their muscle and reserve force if they were to overtake the seemingly victorious Hawks. But with leaps and bounds, the Eagle boat came upon the other a few hundred feet from the base line. Again Rob cast, and again he missed—but this time there was a reason. As his harpoon had launched through the air, Harding had given the line attached to the

"sturgeon" a slight tug. Light as it was, however, it was sufficient to pull the floating target out of the harpoon reach.

"Foul!" shouted Merritt angrily, from the stern of the Eagles' boat. He, too, apparently, had seen the action of Dale, and instantly called the attention of the referee to it. Bartley Holmes was paddling near by, and immediately came alongside.

"What's the trouble?" he demanded.

"Why, Dale Harding jerked the rope just as Rob cast," explained Merritt. "Mustn't they be penalized for a foul?"

"It was an accident!" cried Harding, turning rather white under his tan. "I was stooping down to fix a toggle pin and maybe I accidentally touched the line. I don't believe, though, it made any difference."

"If you touched the line at all, you infringed on a rule," declared the referee. Then to Rob:

"Do you wish to claim this heat on a foul?"

"No, sir," rejoined Rob instantly. "If it was an accident, that's good enough for me. We

don't wish to take advantage of anything like that."

"All right. Go ahead, then."

The Hawks' boat shot forward, and before Rob could gather up his line and coil it for another throw, they had towed the "sturgeon" across their base line.

Instantly from human throats, auto horns, and launch whistles a great uproar arose. While it was at its height, Bartley Holmes once more towed out the sturgeon, and placed it in position for the third and decisive struggle.

"We've got to win this final," Hunt found time to whisper to Harding, while the boats changed bases. "If we capture it, we put the Hawks on top for the winter. If we lose it, we'll have to take second place."

"We'll win it," Dale assured him positively.

"It won't be my fault if we don't," rejoined Hunt. Victory affected him as much as defeat. His cheeks were now flushed with a color that was not all caused by exertion. He openly triumphed over the Eagles as they rowed past.

The final did not open with the dash that had marked the two other heats. Both crews were evidently conserving their efforts for what they felt was to be a severe struggle. In fact, neither boat appeared in any hurry to reach the mark. Both coxswains contented themselves with keeping bow and bow, eyeing each other warily, however, on the alert for any unexpected move on the part of their rivals.

As before, it was Hunt's harpoon that first found a resting place. But as it settled in the wood, Rob's weapon flashed silverly, and skillfully fell so that his line was drawn across the shaft of the Hawk harpoonist's weapon. Then with a quick jerk of his forearm, and, before the Hawks could slacken up, Rob drew his line taut.

Splash!

Out came the Hawks' spear and fell into the water in a shower of spray, cunningly dislodged by Rob's cleverness.

Hunt scowled blackly as the two boats drew alongside to disentangle the weapons. He said nothing, however, but glanced back at Harding.

The lines were speedily cast apart, and the two boats drew off for a fresh attack. But as they did so, Dale Harding inclined his steering oar and the Hawks' boat came crashing down upon the Eagles' craft. Tubby Hopkins' oar was caught between them and almost snapped.

"Hold up! Hold up!" he shouted angrily. "What are you trying to do?"

"Keep off there, Dale. How can you be so careless?" admonished Hunt, but, nevertheless, a gleam of satisfaction lit up his eyes as he noted that Tubby's wrist had been twisted, and from the way in which the fat boy held the member it must have been giving him some pain.

"Don't let accidents like that happen again, Harding," warned Bartley Holmes sharply, "or I'll disqualify you."

"Row right up on it this time; I want to get a good hold," hailed Rob to Merritt. The coxswain nodded and as the oarsmen gave way he directed the prow of the boat almost directly at the floating "sturgeon."

"We'll wait and see what they do," declared

Hunt, addressing his crew. "If they hook fast, I'll try Rob's trick and yank his harpoon out. If they don't, we'll drive the spear deep and tug theirs out."

With a sharp "z-i-i-g!" Rob's harpoon flew from his hand and sank shivering into the soft wood of the "sturgeon."

"Good strike!" shouted Bartley Holmes from his canoe.

"Back water, Eagles!" yelled Merritt, as the Hawks came driving down upon the quarry. Hunt's sinewy form stood erect and tensile for a second, then down drove his arm with every ounce of muscular effort of which he was capable.

"Good boy!" shouted the impartial referee.

The leader of the Hawks had sunk his weapon fully as far into the floating target as had Rob.

"Now for the tug of war," muttered Holmes, as the two boats drew apart, both harpoon-ropes stretching taut as violin strings. Suddenly Rob almost toppled backward as the strain on the Eagles' boat was quickly released and she shot

forward. His harpoon had pulled out. It had not been lodged deeply enough to resist the strain. On the other hand, Hunt's weapon seemed to be somewhat wobbly poised. Evidently, the tugging had weakened its grip.

But the Hawks paid no attention to this. Nor indeed could they do anything to repair it without breaking the rules. Instead, they darted off at top speed for the shore. A mighty, ear-splitting roar went up as it was seen that the Hawk standard was for the second time, apparently, victorious.

"It's two out of three, fellows! We win!" Hunt exclaimed, as his boat shot through the water.

But in the meantime, the Eagles had not been idle. Rob had hauled in his dripping line and now stood once more ready for action. Behind him Tubby was hitting up a terrific stroke. The Eagles' boat fairly flew in pursuit of the captors of the trophy.

"It's now or never," thought Rob, as at twenty feet or more he decided to cast. Another second

and it would be too late. With every effort he could muster, the lad launched his harpoon, aiming, not at the body of the fish, but at the Hawks' weapon.

"He's done it!" went up a shout of exultation from the Eagles' rooters, as for the second time that day Rob's harpoon dislodged his opponent's spear.

"Confound the luck!" grated out Hunt, as he saw the victory torn from his grasp, as it were. His groan of dismay was echoed by every one in the Hawks' boat.

"Close in! Close in!" yelled Dale, urging his crew around, while Hunt rapidly manipulated his line, cast it loose of Rob's, and made ready for a fresh cast.

A current had caught the sturgeon and carried it quite a distance from the two boats, and seaward, while this was going on. A sharp dash followed. It was a culminating tussle. Straining every nerve and muscle, the Eagles and the Hawks flew forward, as swiftly almost as their namesakes.

"Now!" shouted Merritt.

Rob's harpoon whistled through the air and sank, with a "squidge," into the side of the bobbing, evasive target.

A second later Hunt's weapon, too, sought a resting place in the elusive thing. But, alas for Hunt's endeavor! The very energy he threw into his cast unbalanced him, and he toppled with a splash and a great commotion clean over the bow of his craft and into the water.

He could swim like a fish, and came up a second later, puffing and sputtering. With the stream of water he emitted from his lips as he rose to the surface was mingled some savage language. Hastily he grabbed the gunwale of the Hawks' boat, and started to clamber into it.

To his intense joy, he saw, as he emerged from his ducking, that his spear seemed to be firmly fixed in the wooden fish.

"Hurry up!" urged Dale. "We'll get them yet."

The Eagles rapidly passed the line under the keel of their boat till it trailed out astern.

"Give way!" shouted Merritt, and "give way" with a will did the four pairs of healthy young arms. The Eagle boat fairly cut through the water. The maneuver caught the Hawks napping. Before they could do anything their line was drawn taut, and the harpoon Freeman Hunt had planted was jerked out.

"Hooray!" came a deep, swelling roar, surging toward the contestants, from the shore.

"Now then, Eagles, you've got them!"

"After them, Hawks!"

"Don't give up!"

"K-r-ee-ee-ee!"

These cries and a thousand others, mingled in a perfect babel of sound. To the uproar, however, neither of the crews paid any attention. Their efforts and energies were all bent in one direction—to get across the base line first with the fish. The Hawks' boat made a creditable spurt, while Hunt gathered up his line ready for a fresh cast. He would make an attempt to snatch victory out of defeat. How much his mind was bent upon success, it was easy to see

by his lined brow and narrowed eyes. Closer and closer to the flying Eagles crept the Hawks' boat.

Unencumbered by a wooden fish to tow, they could make much faster time. Now they were almost upon the prey, and Freeman Hunt drew himself up for a supreme effort. His brown arm drew back, showing the muscles bulging and working under the flesh.

The next instant the harpoonist of the Hawks made his last cast and—lost! His weapon flashed into the water, missing the target by the fraction of an inch. An instant later the Eagles' boat shot across the base line, amid a pandemonium of cheers, yells, tooting of auto horns and sympathetic groans for the losers. The Eagles had won out in the big event of the day.

CHAPTER III.

JACK CURTISS REAPPEARS.

It was one Saturday night following the aquatic field day. The winter term of hard work had commenced at the Hampton Academy, giving the Boy Scouts less time to devote to their organization work than they had found during the summer. Rob Blake, Merritt Crawford, and Tubby Hopkins were on their way home through the gathering dusk from a game of Hare and Hounds, which had wound up by the catching of the hare at a village called Aquebogue, some distance from Hampton.

At a steady jog trot the three lads were making their way toward their home village. A slight chill predictive of the coming winter was in the air, but for the time of year, mid-October, the evening was unusually calm and warm. It was this late Indian summer that had made the water games possible.

The boys' conversation, as they jogged along, dealt mainly with the astonishing things that had happened to them on the Harkness ranch in the wildest part of Arizona. All of these were related in detail in "The Boy Scouts on The Range." Readers of that book will recall how Rob Blake, the son of the president of the National Bank of Hampton; Merritt Crawford, one of the numerous family of the village blacksmith, and Tubby Hopkins, the offspring of a widow in comfortable circumstances, had accepted the invitation of Harry Harkness to get a taste of life on the range.

Their strange encounter with Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender, their former enemies, was related in that volume, together with the surprising and clever manner in which they turned the tables on those worthies. In that book, too, we saw the raw Easterners—Tenderfeet, as they were—become transformed from "greenies" into good shots, capable riders, and excellent woodsmen. During their western stay they had broadened and developed considerably from the lads who

some months before had formed the Eagle Patrol, as related in the first volume of this series, "The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol." They had returned to Hampton better, mentally and physically, for their trip.

But like most lads who have left their native place for even a short time, they found changes when they returned. Freeman Hunt, the son of a well-to-do resident, had formed the Hawk Patrol, and enrolled in it as many boys as he could. In the meantime, the Eagle Patrol had developed, and now numbered twenty stalwart lads, in addition to the original ten whom we know. In some way, however, instead of the spirit of friendliness and good fellowship that should have prevailed, the Hawk and Eagle Patrols found themselves involved in considerable rivalry.

Now rivalry is good. Nothing could be better in athletics or daily life than a healthy spirit of emulation. It is when rivalry degenerates into bitterness that it is time to call a halt. Under Freeman Hunt's leadership, the Hawks had developed such a spirit. Dale Harding, Hunt's

boon companion, had followed his leader's example in abetting it, instead of trying to allay hard and angry feelings. In fact, despite all that the scoutmasters could do, the Hawks sought every opportunity to lure the Eagles into open hostilities.

Rob Blake and his crowd had managed hitherto to keep their men in check. But the task was daily getting harder. Freeman Hunt had many good qualities, but he could not bear to be beaten at anything. He was a bad loser. Until the return of Rob and his chums from the West, he had had things pretty much his own way. But since that time, every contest in which the Hawks and Eagles had engaged had resulted in victory for the latter. This galled Hunt and Harding exceedingly. They would have liked to see and to hasten the return of Rob and his companions to the West, or anywhere else, so long as they were left a free field for their endeavors.

The Sturgeon Spearing Contest had proved the climax of affairs between the two patrols. In the dressing-room, after the awarding of the

pennant to the Eagles, Hunt had bitterly assailed Rob. The latter had stood taunt after taunt without a word. He good-naturedly ascribed it to Hunt's natural chagrin at being beaten. Finally, an especially bitter remark had moved him to reply. After all, Rob was only human.

"Say, Hunt," he said quietly, "don't you think it would be a heap more manly not to make so much noise about it?"

"No, I don't," grated out Hunt, almost beside himself with rage. He came close up to Rob and shook his fist threateningly.

"Who are you, anyhow, to tell me what I'm to do, eh? What have you got to say about it?"

"Just this," had been Rob's reply, "that I think you are a pretty bad loser."

"Oh, you do, eh? Well, I'm a better man than you—so take that!"

Smack!

The infuriated lad had actually allowed his temper to carry his judgment away so utterly as to strike his conqueror in the face.

The other boys in the place had stood about,

fairly gasping. What would Rob do? To their astonishment, he did nothing. While an angry, crimson mark grew upon his cheek where the blow had fallen, his countenance was calm and composed. But he caught Hunt's hand in a grip of iron.

"Look here, Hunt," he said quietly enough, but every word rang home with sledge-hammer force, "you were beaten to-day. Worse, still, you can't take it like a man. To cap the climax, you have struck me. Don't—do—it—again."

The last words came slowly, but they made Hunt flinch. Even Harding, who had been inclined to urge his crony on, held his breath. Would Rob strike Freeman? That question was soon answered. Rob released the angry boy's wrists, and let him go. Muttering angrily, Hunt had slunk off to a locker.

"Why didn't you have it out with him?" Dale asked him later, after Rob and the others had dressed and gone.

"Too many of his crowd around," Hunt muttered in reply, "but I'll fix him. You watch me.

He's not going to get away with anything like that."

"I'm with you in anything you want to do," Dale assured him.

"I may give you an opportunity before long to show if you mean that or not," rejoined Hunt, but when Dale pressed him for some explanation, he refused to enlarge on the thinly-veiled threat.

Of this conversation, the lads, however, knew nothing, and were, therefore, considerably astonished when, as they descended a bank leading into the road to Hampton Inlet, a stoutly built lad, accompanied by three others of about his own age and build, stepped from behind a hedge, where they had evidently been lying in wait for the returning lads.

As the three figures stepped forward into the road, and blocked the path of the homing lads, Rob recognized them:

"Oh, it's you, is it, Freeman Hunt?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, it's me," retorted the other belligerently, blocking the way, "I want to settle with you."

"Settle with me—what for?" exclaimed the astonished Rob.

"For what you did in the locker room at the club the other day. You have made me the laughing-stock of the place. Take off your coat, for I'm going to give you the worst licking you ever had in your life."

"Mercy me!" exclaimed Tubby, pretending to quake.

"Yes, and you'll be laughing on the wrong side of your face before I get through with him," grated Freeman Hunt. "I can lick Rob Blake the best day he ever walked."

"Do you think so?" asked Rob calmly.

"I do; yes," pugnaciously rejoined Hunt, thrusting forward his chin in a manner he had seen depicted in pictures of pugilists.

"Well, then," was the astonishing reply, "let it go at that. We want to get home."

"Well, what do you think of that?" exclaimed Lem Lonsdale, who was one of the lads accompanying Hunt.

"He wants to get home to his mammy," sneered Dale Harding, Hunt's other companion.

"Yes, but he's got to take his medicine first," snarled Hunt, who had, unfortunately for himself, as it later appeared, mistaken Rob's unwillingness to enter into a bruising match for timidity.

"So, you're afraid to fight, eh?" he jeered. "Well, you've got to. Will you put up your fists, and take it like a man, or will I have to trounce you like a regular coward?"

"Yes, how will you take your licking?" sneered Dale Harding, as Hunt sprang at Rob, thinking to take him by surprise.

"This way!"

Like a pistol-shot, the words were snapped out.

The next instant Hunt was seen to halt in his spring forward, and go toppling backward. Rob, unwilling to hurt him, had "heeled" him. The recumbent lad was furious. He scrambled to his feet, using a torrent of strong language.

"No necessity for that," remarked Rob. The only answer was another volley of profanity.

"Here, take this coat," said Rob, turning to Tubby, and, slipping out of the garment, "I've got to give this fellow a lesson. Next to smoking cigarettes, the worst habit a boy can get into is using bad language."

"Oh, it is, is it? You puling, Sunday-school scholar, take that!"

Hunt crouched, and, suddenly becoming erect, aimed a terrific blow at Rob's head. But, to his surprise, his fist encountered thin air. The next instant, however, something struck him under the chin that felt like a battering-ram. Hunt shook his head and staggered a little.

"Had enough?" inquired Rob. "I'm ready to quit if you are."

Hunt's answer was a perfect bellow of anger. In the city he had been the bully of his neighborhood. He had expected to occupy the same desirable position at Hampton, but, alas for him, he had been speedily disillusioned.

He charged at Rob, and this time managed to get in a powerful blow on the ribs of the Eagle Patrol leader. It made Rob gasp for an instant,

but before Hunt could launch another, Rob countered, ducked, and, rising suddenly under Hunt's guard, like a steel-sprunged Jack-in-the-box, he gave the fellow a swift lesson in boxing. Hunt was staggering about, but still vicious and unconquered, when two figures suddenly crept through the hedge and landed in the road. They were both rough-looking youths, and as well as could be seen in the gloom, were about the same age, or possibly a little older, than any of the lads in the road.

But the sight of them brought a shout to Rob's lips. His exclamation of astonishment was speedily echoed by Merritt and 'Tubby Hopkins.

In the gathering gloom he had recognized the newcomers as Jack Curtiss and Bili Bender. They, on their part, were equally quick in recalling the boys of the Eagle Patrol. Jack Curtiss had a thick stick, a sort of club, in his hand. He raised it threateningly, and made at Rob with it.

"I'll fix you," he exclaimed, pretending virtuous indignation, "you're at your old tricks of bullying and plug-uglying again, are you?"

CHAPTER IV.

PAUL PERKINS' MOTOR SCOOTER.

"You'd better keep out of this, Jack Curtiss," warned Rob, not at all perturbed. "I don't want anything to do with you."

"Oh, you don't! I suppose you didn't have me sent to pris—I mean to a friend's for a visit, and you didn't try to fix Bill Bender? I've got some scores against you, Rob Blake, and I'm going to pay them out, right now."

This tirade proved as astonishing to Hunt and his companions as it did to our boys. Rob and his friends had supposed that Curtiss and Bender were still in prison in the West for the part they had played in the cattle rustling raids. They did not know that influence had been brought to bear in their favor, and on account of their youth the lads had been released. Both had arrived in the village the day before, getting off the train at a distant station and driving to their homes un-

noticed. That afternoon they had been taking a stroll in the woods, killing small animals and stoning birds. They were on their way home, when the noise of the encounter in the road attracted their attention.

But somehow, although Jack Curtiss's arm was raised, it did not fall. Instead, he suddenly thought better of the matter, and retreated, mumbling angrily. Perhaps it had occurred to him that he was not in good odor in the village anyway, and to become mixed up in a fight or attack on the boys might result in his once again being compelled to leave the place.

"Come on, Jack," put in Bill Bender; "no use mixing up in this thing. I hope that Rob Blake gets the thrashing he deserves, though, and——"

"I guess he won't get it this time," laughed Tubby, pointing to Hunt, who, the first shock of astonishment at the interruption over, sat nursing his face on the bank.

"Here, don't you interfere," said Lem Lonsdale, stepping forward threateningly.

"Huh! You want to fight, too?" demanded the fat boy, rolling up his sleeves pugnaciously.

"No; I'll settle with you some other time," responded Lonsdale, with all the dignity he could command.

"Come on, fellows. Let's be getting on home," exclaimed Rob, who had no wish to prolong the affair.

"All right, I'm ready," chimed in Merritt. "I don't like the company around here very well."

Hunt still sat on the bank, nursing his jaw, and Rob began to be afraid that he had hit harder than he had intended. He approached the other with his hand outstretched.

"I'm sorry, Hunt," he said, "but you brought it on yourself, old scout. See here, let's you and I get together and try to cement friendship between the Hawks and the Eagles. It isn't the scout game to sulk and have ructions. Shake hands, won't you, and we'll call it off and run the two patrols in harmony."

Hunt heard him to the end with sullen apathy.

No change of expression crossed his face. As Rob concluded, however, he looked up and said:

"Are you through?"

"Yes, I guess that's about all. Except that——"

"Except nothing!" almost screamed Hunt, springing to his feet, "I hate you, Rob Blake. Ever since you got back from that fool western trip of yours, you've tried to run the village. You won't do it, see? Don't talk friendship to me. I'll fight you to the last ditch, you see if I won't."

"Well, if that's the way you feel about it," said Rob, with a slight sigh, "there's nothing I can do. But it isn't right that two patrols of Boy Scouts should be at loggerheads, just because of your envious temper—for that's all it amounts to."

Hunt, white-faced and trembling, was about to make another spring at Rob, when Dale caught him and held him back.

"Don't be a chump, Freeman," he said in a low voice, "Rob Blake is more than your match. Let him go. There are other ways to get at him."

Rob and his chums did not hear this last remark, and bidding the others "Good-night," a politeness which was not responded to, they continued on their way, leaving behind them three astonished and angry lads, and the two youths who already had shown in numerous ways that they wished all the harm possible to the Boy Scouts.

"Wonder how Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender got out of their trouble in Arizona?" mused Merritt, as they hastened along through the fast-gathering gloom.

"Don't know," responded Tubby, and neither could Rob furnish any explanation. It was not until they entered the village that they learned the true reason of the unscrupulous youths' presence in Hampton. The little place was a-buzz with it, and various plans of protest were talked over. But, as is the case in most small towns in a matter of that kind, no one was willing to "bell the cat," namely, notify Jack's and Bill's parents that the boys were not wanted. So they remained in town, and their presence soon became unremarked. In the meantime, however, an alliance

had been formed between Freeman Hunt and his particular friends and Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender, which boded ill for our lads. To the warnings of their boy friends, however, Rob, Merritt and Tubby only rejoined with laughter. They felt that they had nothing to fear from such a company, in which, as the sequel will show, they were very much mistaken.

On Rob's arrival at home that night, he hastened to his room to remove all traces of his encounter. Washed and dressed, he was about to descend to the library, when, to his astonishment, he heard a strange voice conversing with his father in that room. Yet there was something familiar in the tones, too. Where had he heard it before? At last Rob heard "Good-nights" exchanged between his father and the stranger, and soon after came the swift "chug-chug" of an auto, which, apparently, had been driven around the house, for the boy had not noticed it when he returned home.

"Who was your visitor, father?" inquired Rob, as he sat down to dinner that evening.

"Why, a Lieutenant Duvall, of the regular army," was the rejoinder. "Do you know him?"

Mr. Blake broke off abruptly, for Rob had given a cry of astonishment as he heard the name.

"Know him? I should say so. Why, he's the fellow who led those troops into the Moqui Valley. Don't you remember, when they were giving the snake dance, and——"

"Oh, Rob, I cannot bear to hear about such things!" exclaimed his mother. "You might have been killed by those Indians."

"I guess they would have liked to do something like that," responded Rob, with a laugh, "but it all ended happily, mother."

"Why, as I said, he was the officer who led the cavalry to our rescue. What can he be doing here?"

"Well, what about Lieutenant Duvall?" demanded his father.

"I do not know. He was very reticent about his business. He came to me with a letter of introduction. You know, he has rented the old De Regny place."

"What, the old haunted villa north of here?"

"That's the place," rejoined Mr. Blake. "I can't imagine why he wants it, but, beyond saying that he was here on official business, connected with aeronautical experiments, he would not give me any inkling of the object of his occupancy of the place. His errand to me was to open an account in the bank."

"It is odd," mused Rob. "The De Regny place hasn't been occupied for many years, has it, father."

"Not since Napoleon was sent to St. Helena by the British, my boy. General de Regny, who built the place, was one of the great French leader's most devoted marshals. After Waterloo, he came over here, apparently at Napoleon's own behest, and built this house on the seashore. They say that secret passages run into the grounds from the beach. If this is so, the entrances to them have never been found."

"What did he want secret passages for?" asked Mrs. Blake, to whom the story was comparatively

new. Rob had already heard it in various forms from a dozen sources about the village.

“Why, you see, it is always supposed that there was a plan on foot to rescue Napoleon from St. Helena,” explained Mr. Blake. “In that case, the supposition is, he would have made direct for the Long Island coast, and have been landed in the De Regny home by means of the secret passage from the beach. Of course, you recall the square, glass-sided watch-tower on the summit of the house. That, I imagine, was placed there so that the sea could be constantly scanned for a trace of the approaching vessel bearing the rescued emperor. But, of course, he never came, and in time De Regny died, and the property went to some heirs of his in Virginia. What the government or Lieutenant Duvall can want with it, is beyond my comprehension.”

After dinner Rob lost no time in slipping off to find Merritt and Tubby Hopkins. By telephoning, he found out that they had both gone to the home of Paul Perkins, who will be recalled as the winner of the model aeroplane contest de-

scribed in the first volume of this series, and the aeronautical enthusiast of the Eagle Patrol.

Thither, accordingly, Rob hastened to find his friends and communicate the surprising news concerning the old De Regny place. Paul's mother informed him that he would find the boys in the old wagon house.

"In the wagon house?" exclaimed Rob in some astonishment.

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Perkins. "Paul has some sort of contrivance out there. Whether it's to fly, crawl or walk, I don't know. I only hope he won't break his neck or spile his pants with it, like he did the last time he flitted on wings, and tried to flop from ther wagon house roof."

"Did he break his neck, ma'am?" inquired Rob, with a perfectly serious countenance.

"No, he did not," innocently rejoined Mrs. Perkins, "but he tore his pants suthin' awful."

Sure enough, as Rob approached the wagon house, he could see light streaming from the wide chinks of the tumble-down place, and could catch the sound of boyish voices within.

"And what is that, Paul?" he heard Merritt's voice inquiring.

"That's the propeller," rejoined Paul, with a quiver of pride in his voice.

"Say, where do you keep the grub?"

"That must be Tubby," thought Rob, with a smile. Hastening forward, he rapped at the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed Paul, as Rob, at the same instant, uttered the patrol cry in a peculiar, low tone.

Rob pushed open the door, and saw before him, illuminated by the light of a stable lantern, the most peculiar looking piece of machinery he had ever set eyes on.

"What is it?" he gasped in astonishment.

"It's a motor-scooter," declared Paul, with the inventor's pride vibrating in his voice. He held the lamp aloft so that its radiance streamed on a glittering, bewildering mass of bars, levers, connecting rods and brace wires.

CHAPTER V.

THE BOY WHO MADE THE WHEELS GO ROUND.

'A MOTOR-SCOOTER!' echoed Rob.

"That's right, Rob, and she's a Jim Dandy, too!" exclaimed Merritt enthusiastically.

"She'll eat up space," volunteered Tubby.

"Always on the eating tack," laughed Paul.

"Better than being full of them," remarked the fat boy, dreamily gazing up into the black shadows of the wagon shed roof.

"Say, Paul," asked Rob interestedly, "would you mind telling me what is a motor-scooter. It looks fine," he added encouragingly.

"A motor-scooter," exclaimed Paul, "is a sled driven by an auto engine and propelled by an aeroplane propeller over the frozen surface."

"That sounds fine," chuckled Merritt; "bet you cribbed it out of a book."

Paul Perkins, paying no attention, went on to explain to Rob the points of the strange craft.

He had constructed it ingeniously from parts of an old, broken-down auto left behind by a summer resident. The engine part of the affair rested on a framework of two-by-four timbers, and to the flywheel of the motor had been fitted a pulley connected with a shaft mounted above it, on one end of which was affixed a six-foot aeroplane propeller.

Behind the engine came a seat for the driver, and another beside it for a passenger. Gasoline was carried in a ten-gallon tank placed forward of, and above the motor, while the cooling was effected by means of a fan geared to the forward part of the machinery. Below the framework came the runners on which the odd craft was expected to glide over the ice. These were formed of old wagon timbers, along which strips of iron, constructed from barrel binders, had been nailed.

Such was Paul Perkins' wonderful motor-scooter. Rob, after an inspection of the clever way in which it was put together, could not help admiring the ingenuity of the young constructor.

He knew that Paul was not a rich boy, and that it must have cost him a lot of time and labor to carry out his idea without funds to buy expensive tools or appliances.

"Merritt's father let me use the forge at night," explained Paul, "and in that way Merritt came to be the first to know about it. I told him during last summer."

"And he kept your secret, too," laughed Rob. "But why didn't you tell any one else?"

"I was afraid that it mightn't work."

"Well, will it?"

"Watch."

Paul clambered into the driver's seat and threw in a small switch. Then he turned on the gasoline and adjusted the carburetor.

"Look out!" he shouted.

As he spoke, he turned a crank which he had geared to a toothed wheel on the shaft. The engine turned over once or twice, and only a sort of low sigh resulted. Suddenly there came a sharp sound, like twin explosions.

Chug-chug!

"Hooray, she's off!" shouted Tubby.

Faster and faster the engine began to revolve, the smoke from its exhausts filling the place with smothering vapor. Through the blue haze, they could see the aeroplane propeller threshing round at terrific speed. The frame of the novel craft quivered, as if anxious to move off. But, of course, it could not. The motor-scooter was built for traveling only upon the ice.

"How did you ever come to think of it?" asked Rob, as Paul shut off the engine and climbed out of his seat.

"Why, it was last winter," explained Paul, "you remember the inlet was frozen, and we had iceboat races on it? Well, I was watching them, and thinking why it wouldn't be possible to make an ice motor-boat. First off, I couldn't see how to do it. I figured around, however, and at last I thought out a way. But I didn't have money enough to buy a motor, so I gave up the idea. Then Higgins' auto blew up and took fire. He was disgusted, and when I offered him a small price for the engine he was delighted. He

wouldn't take anything for it, in fact. He figured that the fire had spoiled it. So it had, pretty well, but I fixed it up—and—well, there she is, and what do you think of her?"

"Think?" exclaimed Rob. "I think she is a Jim Dandy, just as Merritt said. But, Paul, will she run on the ice?"

"Don't see why not. The propeller has tremendous driving power. I wish it would hurry up and freeze, I'm dying to try her out."

"I'll bet you are. It will be a long time yet to frost, though. In the meantime, what do you say to taking a little trip out to-morrow afternoon to the old De Regny place? It will make a good walk."

"What on earth do you want to go out there for?" asked Tubby in a surprised tone.

"I have a reason," rejoined Rob. "I'll tell you about it to-morrow. Do you fellows want to go?"

"Of course, but you're mighty mysterious about it," grumbled Merritt.

"Hush! Maybe he's found a corned beef mine!" exclaimed Tubby in a low, cautious voice.

"A corned beef mine? Why, I never heard of such a thing," exclaimed Paul seriously.

"Didst not, little one?" chirped Tubby. "My uncle found one in northern Montana."

"In northern Montana!"

"Yes, sir," went on Tubby, winking at the others, "it's an interesting thing to a fellow like you, Paul, who is fond of scientific research and—and all that sort of thing. Shall I tell you how it occurred?"

"Please do," begged Paul, sitting down on the edge of his invention and composing himself comfortably.

"Well," began Tubby, with the air of one who has deliberated long and seriously over a matter, "it was this way. One fall my uncle, who had been mining all summer, figured it was about time to get out of those northern Montana mountains. He decided, though, before he left, to put in the biggest blast ever heard of, so that when he came back in the spring he could have plenty of rock to work. In due course, he set the blast off, and discovered, to his astonishment, that the

explosion had uncovered a regular cliff of reddish-brown substance, interveined with what looked like the finest jelly."

"You don't tell me."

"But I do tell you. Well, uncle was considerably puzzled. He had never struck anything like that before. All at once, glancing down, he saw his dog was advancing to the cliff. Presently, the creature seized a fragment that had been blasted to some distance, and began devouring it. Imagine my uncle's astonishment to find that the cliff seemingly was edible. He investigated, and found that his blast had miraculously uncovered a deposit of unknown extent of the very finest kind of corned beef."

"Didn't he find a ketchup well or a mustard spring close by?" asked Merritt seriously.

Tubby shook his head.

"No; uncle was a very truthful man. If he had found anything like that, he'd have mentioned it. But he didn't."

"But the explanation," urged the scientific-minded Paul, "how did he ever account for it?"

"Why, an inquiry showed that years before there had been an earthquake there, and a band of cattle had been swallowed up, and it so happened that they were immersed in a salt mine. Thus, a very fine stratum of corned beef was formed, which only awaited my uncle's coming to be given to a grateful public."

"You say that this all happened to your uncle?" asked Paul somewhat suspiciously.

"Yes, sure, to my uncle in Montana."

"Really happened to him?" insisted Paul, who had detected a suspicious quiver on Tubby's lips.

"Yes, indeed. It happened to him just before he fell out of bed."

A shout of laughter went up then, echoing and ringing among the rafters. Paul good-naturedly joined in it, though the merriment was at his own expense, but his laughter was suddenly checked. There was a small window in one side of the place, and, peering through this aperture, Paul had just detected a face. It was a countenance that was familiar to him, and seemed to be taking the utmost interest in the details of his invention.

"What's the matter, Paul?" asked Rob, checking his mirth, as he saw the younger lad's eyes fixed upon the window-pane.

"I—I saw a face there, an instant ago," stut-tered Paul. "It was looking in on us, but it instantly vanished."

"A face! Gee, whiz! who could it have been?" exclaimed Tubby.

"I don't know," rejoined Paul, "but I kind of thought I recognized it for the minute that I saw it."

"Who do you think it was?"

"Freeman Hunt, that fellow who used to——"

But the others had shot out of the barn at top speed.

"I'll give that fellow a lesson if I catch him prowling around here," growled Merritt.

But, although they searched about the place thoroughly, they could find no trace of the intruder. When they got back to the shed, they found Paul putting up an old sack over the window through which the face had peered.

"I'm not going to take any chances with this

machine," the lad said earnestly, "and I want you fellows to promise not to tell any one about it."

"All right," they readily agreed.

"Isn't it patented yet?" inquired Rob.

"No," rejoined Paul. "I've put the matter in the hands of a lawyer in Washington, a friend of my dead father. I guess he'll put it through. I want to sell it and pay off the mortgage on the house; but, in the meantime, I don't want any one to know its details whom I can't trust."

"Well, the secret's safe with us, Paul," Rob assured him, as they parted for the night, "but don't tell too many people about it. That's a valuable invention, to my mind, and you want to guard it closely."

"I will," Paul promised, but he did not tell Rob that earlier in the week he had confided his great secret to Freeman Hunt. That worthy had heard something of a mysterious machine the lad was constructing, and took occasion to find out what it was. By flattering the unsuspecting boy, and telling him what marvelous things he had heard of him, Freeman soon put himself in pos-

session of the details of the machine's construction, and of the things Paul expected to accomplish.

"Sounds good," Hunt had commented to himself that evening; "maybe we can make something out of that kid's information. I'll tell my dad about it. He's slick as paint, dad is."

CHAPTER VI.

TWO MYSTERIOUS MEN.

THE next afternoon the four lads left the village shortly after lunch, and struck out along the sandy road leading in the direction of the De Regny place. It was warm, and, walking on the heavy, sandy road proved oppressive. In fact, before they had traversed two miles of the distance, Tubby was begging for a drink of water.

"What do you want with water?" scoffed Merritt. "Doctors say that it makes fat."

"I don't care," retorted Tubby. "I want a drink, and I'm going to have it, too."

"Dig in the road for it, I suppose, or get it out of the sea yonder," laughed Rob.

"Neither, Mister Smart Alec; I'm going to get it at that house back there."

The stout lad indicated a rather tumble-down dwelling, situated in the midst of a ragged orchard, which was set back some distance from

the road. It had once been the home of a fisherman, but had been long deserted. Tubby knew, however, there was a well on the place, which yielded clear, cold water. Without another word to his companions, he struck off across the uneven ground toward the hut.

"Guess I could stand a drink," said Merritt suddenly.

"Same here," agreed Rob, and the two struck off after their rotund comrade.

"I'm thirsty, too," said Paul.

Close to the house, dense clumps of lilacs had grown up, straggling in every direction, and forming a deep, impenetrable screen. As the boys came up to the place, they were startled to hear, from within the hut, the sound of voices.

"I thought the place was deserted," gasped Merritt, using a low tone, however.

"So did I," chimed in Tubby. "Let's get out of here. Maybe they're tramps, or something."

"Hardly likely," whispered Rob, parting the bushes ever so little and peering through. The other two each made a similar observation place

for himself. Through this leafy screen they could see the interior of the front room of the hut plainly. To their astonishment, a few rough pieces of furniture stood within, and, at a battered table, two men were seated, talking earnestly. One of them was a big, broad-shouldered fellow, with a ruddy face and shifty blue eyes. The other was a small, dapper man, dressed nattily, almost fastidiously. The back of this latter fellow had been partly turned when the lads came in, but as he faced restlessly about in his chair, the boys could not suppress a start of astonishment.

The man was a Japanese!

More surprising still, the fellow with him could now be seen to be garbed in the uniform of a United States regular.

Fascinated, with round eyes and attentive ears, the boys bent forward on tip-toe to hear the conversation that was going on.

"So Duvall suspects nothing," the Japanese said in perfect English, evidently continuing a

conversation, the first part of which they had missed.

The soldier laughed.

"Not he. I've managed to get several drawings besides the ones I have already brought you. In about a week's time my work will be finished, and then I'll skip. You are sure your government will have that appointment for me?"

"Absolutely certain, Honorable Dugan. Nippon is not ungrateful for any services that may have been done her, and you will reap your reward. But when is the trial flight to be made?"

"As soon as the equalizer is finished."

"And that will be?"

"Some time this coming week."

"You have not been able to get plans of the equalizer yet?"

"No; as I told you, I have failed so far. Lieutenant Duvall will not let them out of his hands. But I'll get them, if I have to knock him down and take them from him."

"That is right," smiled the Jap. "I could wish you were acquainted with jiu-jitsu, to make

your task more easy. Above all things, I must have the working plans of the equalizer. The rest does not matter so much, but to equip our aerial fleet we must have that device."

"You see, it's the invention of Duvall himself, and for that reason he guards it pretty close."

"Naturally. However, we shall be too clever for him. You don't think any one suspects my presence here?"

"Not a bit of it," Dugan assured his yellow skinned companion. "Didn't you come in by night and make straight for this place? You couldn't have a better hiding-place. No one ever comes here, and——"

Cra-c-k!

A board, upon which Tubby had unthinkingly stood, so as to obtain a better view, gave way under the heavy youth's weight at this interesting point. With a gasp of dismay, Tubby clutched at the lilacs to save himself from falling, thereby creating even more noise.

"Who's there?" roared Dugan, springing to his feet. The boys caught the glint of a revolver,

as he shot erect. Like a small and venomous snake, the Jap, too, was up like a flash. But they were neither of them quick enough to catch a glimpse of the scouts, as they dashed off into a patch of woods lying to the left, into the shadows of which they had dived, wriggling along on their stomachs, before either Dugan or the Jap had recovered from their start.

From their cover, the boys could see the pair emerge from the house and search about it thoroughly, without, of course, finding a trace of anything unusual.

"Guess it must have been a rabbit or something," they could hear Dugan say, after a prolonged search that showed no indication of human surveillance.

"Huh! Honorable rabbit gave me a big jump," they heard the Jap rejoin.

The two went back into the house, no doubt to continue their deliberations, while the boys, making a detour through the woods, once more emerged on the main road, with Tubby's thirst still unsatisfied.

"Now, what do you suppose was the meaning of that confab?" asked Merritt, as they trudged along.

"Looks to me like treachery of some sort," rejoined Rob. "Those Japs have been busy in Mexico during the insurrection. You know, they wanted to get a coaling base there. They certainly are not friends of Uncle Sam's, however much they pretend to be, and when you see one of our soldiers in such a consultation with one of them, it looks bad."

"That's right," agreed Merritt. "But what could they have been talking about? Of course, you told us about Lieutenant Duvall having leased the De Regny place for some mysterious government work. Evidently that man Dugan is there with him, and perhaps several more soldiers. But what do you suppose they are doing?"

"That was one reason why I proposed this walk this afternoon," said Rob. "Maybe we can find out something. But I think from what Dugan said it's pretty plain what the government is doing at the De Regny place."

"What do you think it is, Rob?" asked Tubby interestedly.

"Testing out some sort of an airship."

"What!"

"That's right. Didn't you hear the Jap speak of a Japanese aerial fleet?"

"So he did!" exclaimed Merritt. "And now I come to think of it, I remember I read some time ago that Lieutenant Duvall had invented a stability device for aeroplanes. At the time, though, I didn't connect it with *our lieutenant*."

"What we've got to do is to find the lieutenant and tell him about what we overheard," said Rob decidedly. "Those fellows may succeed in their schemes, otherwise."

"Ugh!" exclaimed Tubby, with a shudder, "I'd hate to have had that fellow Dugan grab hold of me. He's an ugly-looking customer."

"He is," agreed Rob, "but we can't help that. Our duty is clear. Why, if the Japs ever got hold of a practicable invention like that, they could send an aerial fleet across the border and demoralize the country."

"Always supposing it is a practicable invention," put in the practical Paul Perkins quietly.

"Of course," the impetuous Rob hastened to agree.

Talking thus, they neared the De Regny place, which deserves some description, as being, both by tradition and appearance, one of the most remarkable places along the Long Island shores.

CHAPTER VII.

HOW A SECRET PASSAGE WAS USED.

THE house was a mouldering mansion of wood, three stories in height, and once a truly imposing specimen of the architecture of the period in which it was erected. Time and neglect, however, had done their work, and it was now dark, unpainted, and forbidding looking, set back, as it was, in a fenced park of several acres in extent. A clump of dark hemlocks surrounded the house, adding to the gloomy note of its unpainted walls, broken shutters and shattered windows, while in the neglected grounds weeds and trailing, unkempt vines ran riot everywhere.

Only to seaward was the place unencumbered by this wild, disordered tangle. In that direction there lay a broad, brick-floored terrace, of immense dimensions, upon which, tradition had it, Marshal De Regny used to strut with a telescope, ever and anon looking seaward for a

sight of the expected vessel bearing the rescued captive from St. Helena.

This terrace, the boys were astonished to see, had been recently swept and repaired, offering a broad, smooth floor of considerable extent. At one end, too, stood a brand-new shed, painted green, and quite large. In front, and opening on the terrace, this shed had large double doors. What it housed could hardly be guessed from the exterior. The few fishermen who visited this isolated part of the beach concluded that the green shed must be a sort of boathouse.

The boys, however, basing their conclusions on the conversation they had overheard a short time before, decided that the airship, or aeroplane, or whatever kind of aerial craft it was, with which experiments were being conducted, must be housed within this shed.

Suddenly they saw a slender, erect figure, clad in the uniform of an officer of the United States Army, crossing the rough lawn lying between the house and the bricked terrace.

"It's Lieutenant Duvall!" exclaimed Rob, hast-

ening forward, followed by the others. The officer presently spied the intruders, and stopped short, with an angry expression on his countenance as he did so.

"You boys must keep off here!" he ordered, coming toward them. "This is now government property."

"We'll get off it in just five minutes," answered Rob, somewhat abashed at this reception, "but in the meantime I've something to tell you of great importance. It hasn't to do with the Moquis, either," he added mischievously.

At these words, a great light seemed to break over the officer. In the nattily-uniformed boys before him, it was no wonder he had not sooner recognized the lads he had last seen in tattered, worn, cowboy rig-outs, stained with powder, and worn by a hard chase across the mountains to the Moqui valley.

"Why!" he exclaimed, his manner changing, and both hands extended in a cordial way, "it's the young broncho busters! Hull-lo, boys! I'm

glad to see you again. But what are you doing in this part of the country?"

"We happen to live here," rejoined Rob demurely, after the first greetings had been exchanged.

"That's so. You did tell me, I remember now, that you lived here. That must have been your father I saw last night. Very forgetful of me, but I've had so much on my mind lately that I've slipped up on a lot of things I should have carried a recollection of. We're carrying out some big experiments here."

"Which brings us to what we accidentally overheard on our way out here," exclaimed Rob. "Is there a man named Dugan detailed to duty here?"

"Dugan? Yes—a most capable man—invaluable to me. Why?"

The officer was frankly astonished, and showed his bewilderment.

As may be imagined, his astonishment not only increased, but became mingled with anger, as

Rob launched out into a full and detailed account of all they had overheard.

"The scoundrel," muttered the officer, gritting his teeth, "and to think that I have regarded him as my most trusted assistant."

"But he doesn't know the secret of your equalizer," ventured Merritt.

"No. Thank goodness, he does not, but," the officer's face grew troubled, "I wish I had the plans in a safe place. Somehow, since you have told me all this, I can only regard everybody about me as a traitor. If only I had left the plans with your father to be placed in the safe deposit vault in his bank, my mind would be easy."

"Then you can work out your ideas without the plans?" asked Rob, in some astonishment.

"My boy, when an inventor has dreamed, and thought and pondered over an idea for many long days and sleepless nights, it is photographed on his brain, and he can never forget it."

"Then I have an idea!" exclaimed Rob. "Let me take the plans back with me to town. I can

hand them over to my father, and he can place them in a vault in the bank."

"The very thing!" exclaimed the young officer. "I know I can trust you, Blake, and you won't mind if I give them to you in a sealed envelope."

"Not a bit," rejoined Rob. He flushed a bit, though, as he spoke, although the words came readily enough.

"You see," explained the officer, who had noticed the flush, "I almost dread to let even you have the plans. I cannot bear to let them out of my sight. This Jap—I have a suspicion who he is—is not the only one who is after them for his government. Aerial equipment has now become an important adjunct of every navy and army. In Washington, two attempts were made to get them from me, but in this lonely place I thought I was safe."

"At least in my father's bank they will be secure——" began Rob, when he broke off short, and turned swiftly. His keen ear had detected a slight rustling in a clump of bushes behind him. As he communicated his suspicion that some one

might have been concealed there, they all sprang forward, surrounding the clump, but there was no sign of a concealed listener, and, satisfied that everything was well, they followed the young officer toward the house. Their conductor narrated, as they went, such details of the experimental work as he thought might interest the lads.

Hardly had they vanished within the gloomy, deserted mansion, however, before two faces appeared above the surface of the ground, peering up from the mouth of one of the concealed passages which Mr. Blake had mentioned as existing on the old place.

Could the boys have seen those two countenances, they would have been greatly interested, for one of them was Freeman Hunt's and the other was Jack Curtiss's. To explain how they came to be there, it is necessary to revert for a moment to an occurrence which took place some weeks before on a fishing expedition. Driven by bad weather to shelter in the little cove not far from the De Regny place, the party, consisting of

Freeman Hunt, Dale Harding and Lem Lonsdale, had hastily sought a shelter from the pelting rain, as their boat was an open one. In a low, rocky cliff, a half-obsured opening showed.

"Looks like there might be a cave in behind there," Hunt said, and, on his suggestion, they set to work moving away several big rocks that encumbered the opening. The place proved to be a cave, and an ample one, running back to a great depth, seemingly.

An exploration party had been formed at once, and, after traversing a narrow passage, running back underground for some distance, the lads emerged, to their astonishment, in the clump of bushes in which Rob had just heard the rustling sound.

On this particular day, Hunt and Jack Curtiss had visited the cave alone to explore it more thoroughly. The branch passages they expected to find were not there, however, but, threading the original one, they had emerged into the clump which thickly screened its opening, in time to overhear most of the conversation of the Boy Scouts and the army officer.

As the door of the old house slammed, its echoes reverberating through the tangled, overgrown grounds, Jack Curtiss turned to his companion with a grin of satisfaction.

"Here's the chance we've been looking for," he exclaimed, wiping the sweat and dirt from his forehead,—for burrowing in long disused passages is dirty work.

"You mean a chance to get even?" asked Hunt in a puzzled tone.

"Yes. We can fix that Rob Blake up so that he'll be in disgrace from this afternoon on."

"I don't understand," rejoined Freeman, who, while he had chosen Jack Curtiss for a companion, had not a tenth part of the other's evil ingenuity.

"Well, I do," was the confident rejoinder. "It's up to us to find this Jap and this Dugan, or whatever his name is. If we can do so, we've got Rob Blake where we want him."

"I see now!" exclaimed Hunt, a light of comprehension showing in his eyes, "but do you dare——"

“Dare!” repeated Jack Curtiss scornfully, “I’d dare do anything to get even with Rob Blake, and,” he added prudently, “the best of it is, that there’s not a chance of it ever being traced to us. If we are only lucky enough to find those fellows they mentioned, they can do the dirty work, and we have the satisfaction of being even with those cubs.”

“But how are you going to find them?” asked Hunt, still hesitating.

“There’s only one road from that hut to this place. We’ll sneak through the grounds while they are all in the house, and nail this chap Dugan in time to put our plan into execution.”

An instant later, two grimy, dust-covered forms emerged from the bowels of the earth, as it seemed, and shoving their way through the dense clump of bushes, glanced cautiously about them.

“Coast’s clear,” announced Jack presently.

Together, Rob’s old enemy and Freeman Hunt, now his equally bitter foe, sped across the De Regny grounds and toward the road.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN UNEXPECTED ENCOUNTER.

"You younkers are certain you are telling me the truth?"

Dugan, the treacherous private, paused, and, from his immense height, looked down into the faces of Jack Curtiss and Freeman Hunt.

"As sure as we stand here," Jack assured him, "I've told you how we came to overhear what was said. If you want those plans, now is your chance to get them."

"And don't forget to beat Rob Blake up good and proper," chimed in Hunt, who had lost all prudence in his eagerness to have his grudge avenged.

"You bet I won't," Dugan grunted. "I guess if he's the sort of boy you describe him to be, he won't give them up without a struggle."

"You could break him in two with one hand tied behind your back," struck in Jack, gazing at

the immense frame and loosely hung, ape-like arms of Dugan.

"Leave that to me, kid," Dugan assured him, with an ominous grin, "and—hullo, here comes Hashashi now. That's lucky. I may need him if there are three of them."

Turning in the direction in which the soldier had spied the newcomer, the lads saw a small, slightly-built figure approaching them. It was the Japanese with whom Dugan had been seen conversing in the hut when the unsuspected listeners had overheard.

"Guess we'll be going," said Jack Curtiss uneasily.

"Hold on!" exclaimed Dugan, clutching him with a grip of iron, as he spoke. "You've got to promise me that you don't tell nothing of this."

"Of course," Jack assured him; "we've promised you once."

"And I guess you'll keep your word," said the man, grimly compressing his lips till they formed a narrow line. "If I ever suspect you of telling a thing about it, I've got you two ways. In the

first place, I'll reveal your part in the plot, and, in the second, I'm a bad man to have for an enemy."

Dugan drew his low forehead into a dozen horizontal puckers, as he spoke. With his lowering brow and ape-like face, he looked indeed, as he had said, "a bad man to have for an enemy."

"D'ye understand?" he grated harshly, glaring at Jack grimly.

Curtiss, who was as big a coward as he was a bully and reprobate, felt his knees knock together under that ferocious gaze.

"Y-y-yes, sir," he said.

"You, too!" hissed Dugan, switching suddenly on Freeman Hunt, who was looking nervous and ill at ease. He began to think that perhaps they had let themselves in for something more serious than they had bargained for.

"I won't breathe a word of it," Hunt hastened to assure him.

"You'd better not," snarled Dugan, more savagely than ever, "now, git!"

Without further loss of time, Jack Curtiss and

Freeman Hunt "got." To their surprise, as they turned to hasten off, no sign of the Jap was to be seen, yet an instant before he had been in the road, not more than ten yards from them. There were no hedges at this point, and salt meadows stretched out to the sea on one side, and stubble-fields, flat and level, on the other.

"Where on earth did that Jap go to?" asked Jack in a mystified tone, as they hurried away.

"Don't know," rejoined Freeman, with a trembly feeling. "There was something uncanny about it.

"I—I begin to wish we hadn't met those fellows or had anything to do with them," he burst out, in a complaining tone.

"There you go, sniveling like a baby," sneered Jack Curtiss. "Why, a short time ago, you were only too pleased to have found such an easy way of getting even on Rob Blake and those other young whelps."

"I know," rejoined Hunt timidly, "but—but I don't like the look of that fellow Dugan. He scared me. If he ever suspects us of betraying

him, he'll take a terrible revenge. I wish we hadn't meddled in the thing at all, I wish——"

"Say, you make me tired," broke in his companion angrily, "we're not going to tell about it, are we? We won't be foolish enough to let on that we had anything to do with the beating Rob Blake is bound to get."

"No, but——" quavered Hunt.

"Oh, tell it to your grandmother," scoffed Jack. "Come on. Hurry up; we want to get away from here before the fun begins."

Hastening on, they soon were out of sight and earshot of the spot in which their momentous colloquy had taken place.

In the meantime, from behind a large rock, not far from where Dugan was standing, the lithe form of the Jap suddenly upreared itself.

"Wow! You gave me a scare that time!" exclaimed Dugan, as his ally came into view. "How did you vanish like that, a few minutes ago?"

"Simple, my dear friend. I simply took advantage of a large rock by the roadside, and

dodged behind it. There was nothing of Oriental mystery in it, I assure you."

"Huh!" rejoined Dugan, as if only half convinced. "You're a queer fellow, Hashashi. What did you come after me for, anyhow? Not but what I'm mighty glad to see you right now."

"I hastened after you to give you some final instructions I had forgotten," was the reply. "But what were you talking to those boys about?"

"Something mighty interesting to us both. Listen."

Dugan rapidly related all that Jack had told him.

"Of course," he concluded, "there is a chance that they may not come down this road, but, in any event, we know now where the plans are, and if the worst comes to the worst——"

"The vaults of country banks are not proof against Shimose," grinned the Jap.

"Hark!" exclaimed Dugan suddenly. "I hear voices—boys, too," he went on, after a minute's listening; "get behind that rock yonder. I'll

stop them and ask the time of day or something, and you make your appearance when you think you are needed."

"All right, my honorable comrade," chuckled the Jap, sliding like a gray-suited shadow toward the rock, and vanishing from view behind it.

On came the three unsuspecting boys, chatting and laughing, and little dreaming of what lay in store for them round the turn of the road. Dugan, an evil expression on his countenance, drew back a little, and then, as they drew closer, started forward.

"Got the time, young fellow?" he asked in a natural, easy tone, as the three lads came up to him.

"It's the man we saw in the hut!" exclaimed Tubby, in a rather affrighted tone, but so low that Dugan did not hear him.

"Well, he can't possibly know what we have been doing," rejoined Rob, in an equally cautious voice. Thinking it best not to give the man even a slight excuse for suspicion, he drew out his watch.

"It's just three-thirty," he said.

"Thanks," said Dugan, who all this time had been carefully sizing up the three lads. Rob he recognized by description as being the one who was likely to carry the plans of the equalizer.

"Phew!" he remarked to himself. "They're three husky youngsters for fair. Glad I've got a revolver, or I might get the worst of it."

The boys were starting on again when Dugan stepped back a pace or two and spread his immense bulk across their path.

"Hold on a minute, boys," he said. "I've got something to say to you. You've been calling on Lieutenant Duvall."

"We've been for a walk," rejoined Rob boldly. "I don't know who this Lieutenant Duvall is you're talking about."

"You don't, eh, you young mucker?" Dugan had decided that his best chance lay in scaring the three lads. "Well, I do. Don't try to lie to me."

He contorted his face in hideous fashion. This was a trick he had found very successful in

intimidating other persons he wished to bully or oppress. But in the three boys before him, as we know, Dugan was up against boys out of the ordinary run. Instead of being impressed, Rob simply took a step forward, turning to his chums and saying in a natural, unshaken voice.

"Come on, fellows."

"Yes, come on, fellows," sneered the other. "Not so fast, my young buckos. I want a word with you. You've got some plans in your pockets. Are you going to give them up peaceably, or do you want a taste of Bill Dugan's fists?"

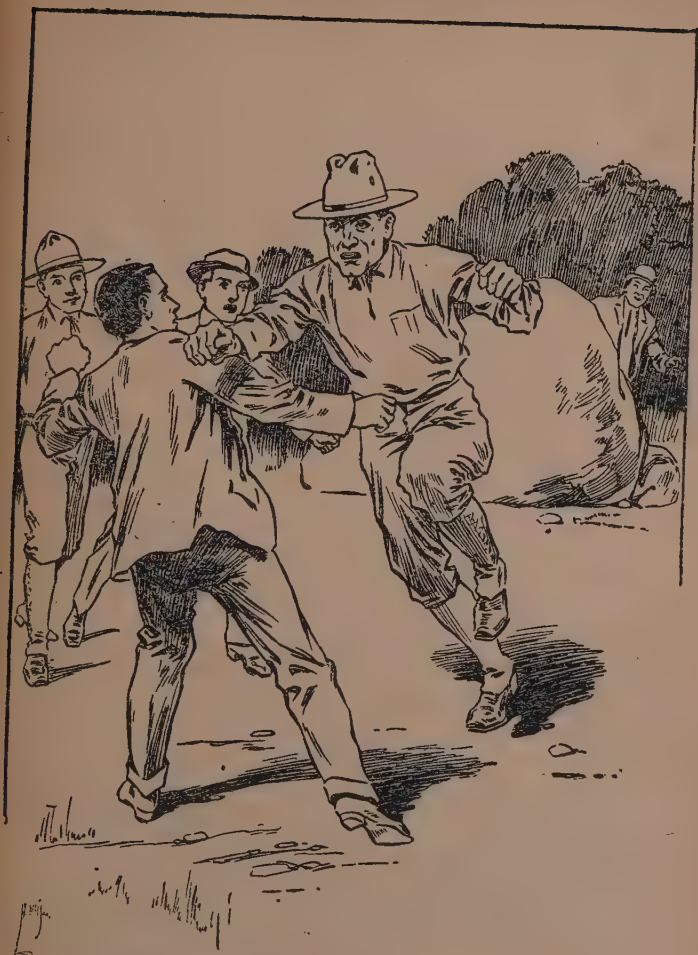
Rob could not repress a start, not of fear, but of astonishment, as the fellow spoke.

How could he know anything about the plans he was carrying to the safe deposit vaults?

Dugan misinterpreted his hesitation.

"Come on now," he grated, coming closer, with an ugly leer on his face; "fork over!"

As he spoke his hand crept back toward his hip. He might have to use his revolver. These boys were proving more obstinate than he had imagined. To his amazement, no trace of fear



With a bellow of rage Bill Dugan leaped forward.

or alarm appeared on their faces for all his blustering.

"See here," exclaimed Rob boldly, "I don't know who you are and I don't think I want to better the acquaintance. I do know this, however, that you wear the uniform of a United States soldier. Let us pass at once, and stop this nonsense, or——"

With a bellow of rage, Bill Dugan leaped forward. At the same instant he aimed a powerful blow at Rob's head. The lad could hear the ponderous fist whistle as it cut through the air. But somehow, when the blow landed—or reached the point where it should have landed—Rob wasn't there. The boy had nimbly sidestepped.

"That won't do you no good," bellowed Dugan, assuming furious rage, both to impress the boys and to conceal his astonishment. "I've got you where I want you. Are you going to give up them plans?"

"I am not!"

The reply came swift as a bullet. Rob realized that in some way the rascal before him knew

that the precious designs were in his possession. He determined that they would not leave his person without a struggle. Somehow he felt that the three of them, all clean-lived, healthy, muscular boys, should prove a match for the hulking, bloated, blustering brute before him. He was totally unprepared for the fellow's next move, however. With a gliding motion of one hand, so swift as to be almost imperceptible, Dugan suddenly produced a gun. At the same instant he gave a shrill whistle, and from behind his rock the serpentine form of the Jap appeared. His almond shaped eyes glittered balefully as he took in the scene before him.

Dugan took quick advantage of the temporary distraction of the lad's attention.

With an agility which would hardly have been expected from his huge proportions, he suddenly sprang forward. Rob, totally unprepared as he was for such a move, could not defend himself. Down he toppled into the dust, before the savage onslaught of the giant Dugan's great form falling on top of him and pinning the lad securely to the ground.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEREIN CAPTAIN HUDGINS' BEES SWARM.

As Rob and the soldier sprawled in the road "hugger-mugger," Merritt darted forward. He succeeded in seizing Dugan's gnarled fist just as it was about to come crashing down in the boy's face, but as his fingers closed upon Dugan's arm a convulsive pain shot through the corporal of the Eagles. Switching round he saw, bending over him, the grinning face of the Jap. The Oriental had merely pressed upon some nervous center of Merritt's being, and had for a second paralyzed all effort. It was the lad's first introduction to jiu-jitsu.

"Ouch!" yelled Merritt, in spite of himself.

The next instant his exclamation was echoed by the Jap. Tubby's rotund form had come hurtling upon the Oriental like a thunderbolt, bearing him to the ground. Temporarily his jiu-jitsu tricks were at a discount.

But all this did not materially aid Rob, who felt his strength fast ebbing under ineffectual attempts to throw off the mighty grip of the massive Dugan. The giant encircled the lad's wind-pipe with his rough fingers and squeezed till Rob grew purple in the face. In the meantime, the other lads had their hands full with the Jap, who had again exercised his cunning, and by a simple pressure upon a spot near Tubby's heart had rendered that youth inactive for some moments.

Dugan's great paws were sliding under Rob's jacket to search his inside pockets, when a voice, suddenly hailing them, caused both attacked and attackers to look up. So engrossed had they been in defense and aggression that not one of them had noticed the approach of a stout, thick-set man, in clothes that somehow suggested a sailor. The newcomer's hair was iron gray and a tuft of the same colored growth adorned his square chin. Under his arm he carried a large box of some kind, carefully covered with newspapers.

For a second he stood petrified with astonishment at the scene upon which he had so unex-

pectedly come. The next instant his blue eyes snapped steelily, and with a roar he dashed toward the combatants.

"Avast there!" he bawled. "Lay aft, you lubbers! Boy Scouts, ahoy!"

"Captain Hudgins!" shouted Merritt.

"Aye, it's the captain!" bawled the valiant extar, leaping forward and dealing Dugan a terrific blow with his free arm. With the other he kept tight hold of his big box.

"You interfering old lummo!" bawled Dugan, springing erect, with a roar of fury. "Keep out of this!"

"Not much I won't," bellowed the captain, just as loudly. "Lay aft, you military pirate, or the navy's goin' to wipe up the ground with the army."

As the captain spoke, brandishing aloft his free arm, Dugan sprang for him, aiming one of his terrific swings. The captain, who was nimble for his years, sidestepped swiftly, but not quick enough to altogether avoid the blow. Du-

gan's fist fell upon the box he was carrying with a crunching, crackling sound.

"Now you've done it!" bawled the captain, dancing about as if executing a hornpipe. "'Vast afore they board yer!"

"Don't try to bluff us," roared Dugan; "we _____"

But before he could complete the sentence there was an angry buzzing sound in the air, like the drone of a sawmill cutting through a tough, knotty log. Simultaneously, from the broken box, there poured a dark stream of flying things.

"Bees!" shouted Merritt.

"Honey makers!" exclaimed the experienced Tubby, as the dark swarm surged down upon Dugan.

"Ho! ho! ho! Here's where you get stung!" shouted the captain. "Come close to me, boys, and they won't hurt yer. Hey there, after 'em, sting the scoundrels. Get your hooks inter that yaller-faced lime juicer. Hooroh! That's the

time he got you! I guess them bees is thar with ther business ends!"

In these, and a dozen similar exclamations of satisfaction, did the captain indulge, as the bees angrily settled in swarms upon Dugan and his Oriental companion. Rob, who had scrambled to his feet, stood with the others close to Captain Hudgins, and not a bee bothered them. The intelligent insects knew their owner too well to attack him. With Dugan and the Jap, however, the case was different.

In vain did the two rascals wave their arms about and beat the air in a desperate effort to free themselves of their tormentors. It was of not the slightest avail. The bees settled upon them in angry masses in every exposed part. Some even dropped down the Jap's back, and commenced an attack there.

Yelling like Comanches and whirling their arms frenziedly about their heads, the two ruffians fairly leaped the fence at one bound in their pain and astonishment, and dashed off across

the fields toward the sea. About them, as they ran, hovered a dark, angrily buzzing cloud.

"Hey, come back thar! You've took my prize Eye-talian queen!" the captain bawled at the top of his voice, but, somewhat naturally, the fugitives paid no attention to his words. Straight for the sea they dashed, and, plunging into the surf, rolled over and over in frantic attempts to rid themselves of the clinging, stinging pests.

"Ho! ho! ho!" roared the captain. "That's as good as a fair breeze arter a c'am. But avast thar, lads, how come you ter be in such a pickle?"

Rob, whose throat still showed the red marks where Dugan's fingers had clutched, hastily explained, being frequently interrupted by the captain with exclamations of:

"Belay thar! The deck-swabbing, land-lubbers! Heave ahead!" and "Douse my glimmering sidelights!"

"Wall," opined the captain, when Rob had concluded, "I reckon them fellers is off on a long cruise. They shore did heave their anchors sudden. The worst of it is my bees has gone with

'em, and I'm generally mighty partic-lar who my bees associates with."

But it was now the captain's turn to explain how he came to be on the road between Hampton and the isolated De Regny place at such an opportune moment. It appeared that the lone recluse of Topsail Island had been to the distant farm of a friend of his to aid him in wintering some bees. He had taken a hive of his own honey makers with him to obviate the chance of being stung by the strangers.

"Bees won't attack any one they knows, or who they has an introduction to," he explained. "Now you see them bees wouldn't touch any of you boys. Now then, that's——"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Tubby suddenly, clapping one hand to the back of his neck.

"Belay thar, lad, what's in yer rigging?" demanded the captain anxiously, rising from the broken box which he had set down in the road and had been using as a seat.

"I—I think it's a bee," rejoined the stout youth.

"I—I'm sure it is, in fact. Wow! there's another!"

The lad began dancing about as if he were on springs.

"Thought you said they wouldn't sting any one they were introduced to," said Rob, with a half smile.

"Wall, I guess in the hurry I must hev overlooked them two," responded the captain, without the quiver of an eyelid. Stepping up to the capering Tubby, he deftly removed two bees from the back of his neck.

"Consarn ye!" he said angrily, as if he were addressing human beings. "What's the matter with you, you mutinous dogs."

The boys burst into a roar of laughter at such talk addressed to bees, but the captain solemnly assured them that the little winged creatures understood every word.

"Will those that flew away come back to you?" inquired Rob, with interest.

"No, lad. They've deserted ther ship," was the rejoinder. "But they done it in a good cause,

so I ain't got a word to say. But now let's trim our sails, up anchor, and lay a course for home. My boat's at the Inlet, and I've got ter make ther island by dark."

"How is Skipper?" asked Rob, as they accordingly strode forward at a brisk pace.

"Just as good a shipmate as ever," was the response. "That thar dog gits more sensible every day. I thought that time when he found them uniforms thet Jack Curtiss and that rascal Bender stole that he was just about the limit in dog sense, but he does smarter things than that right along. Speakin' uv that, what's come of Jack Curtiss and his piratical shipmates?"

The boys soon told him what they knew of those two worthies. The captain shook his head as he heard.

"Bad craft them two," he observed, shaking his head with renewed energy. "But, to my thinkin', they ain't much worse than that yaller-skinned feller and his mate wot attacked you on the road."

"No," Rob agreed; "if it hadn't been for you, we should have been in bad straits."

"If it hadn't a bin fer them bees, lad, you mean," amended the captain earnestly.

Soon after, they reached the Inlet and the captain set out for the wharf, having exacted a promise from the boys to visit him at an early date.

"Ther island's seemed kind er lonesome since the Boy Scout camp weighed anchor," he said.

"We'll be back again this summer," Rob assured him.

When Rob reached home he found a telephone message awaiting him. It was from Lieutenant Duvall. The boy soon obtained connection with his friend, one of the improvements at the mansion having been the installation of a 'phone. The lieutenant actually gasped as he listened. He had trusted Dugan implicitly up to that afternoon, and the revelation of his brutal attack following the lad's disclosures of what they had overheard in the hut had shaken his faith in human nature tremendously.

"I don't know who to trust," he exclaimed over the wire. "No," in answer to Rob's question, "Dugan has not come back. When he does I shall see that he is sent to Washington under guard."

But Dugan did not return to his duty with the aero squad that night, nor on any succeeding night. He and the Jap disappeared as completely as though the earth had swallowed them. A visit to the hut revealed a cot-bed and the rough furniture the lads had noticed, but there were no other traces of human occupancy.

"Good-by, Dugan," chorused the lads, as it became certain that the ruffianly wearer of the army uniform had vanished from their midst, but could they have looked into the future they would, perhaps, have changed their form of farewell to "Au revoir."

CHAPTER X.

MR. STONINGTON HUNT—SCHEMER.

ONE afternoon, not long after the events related in the last chapter, Paul Perkins had a visitor. The caller was Freeman Hunt's father, a man of past middle age, but flashily dressed notwithstanding the plentiful sprinkling of gray in his hair and carefully trimmed mustache. A diamond ring sparkled on Mr. Hunt's left hand and a similar stone blazed in his tie. He regarded the wearing of the jewels as advertisements of prosperity, and wore them with the same satisfaction with which he looked upon his new, gaudily furnished house on the hill above the village, and his automobile—also very new—and his numerous other possessions, all of which, like himself, seemed somehow to savor of veneer and to nowhere have the true ring of solid wood.

There was, perhaps, a reason for this. Ston-

ington Hunt had not always enjoyed "ease and a competency." His earlier years, in fact, had been a hard struggle. He had been a messenger boy for a firm of Wall Street brokers, but, by natural sharpness and shrewdness, had worked himself up till he obtained an interest in the business. Then he branched out. His fortune grew by leaps and bounds, till Stonington Hunt was recognized as a wealthy man. The newspapers had shown up several of his financial transactions as being distinctly shady, but somehow he had always been "smart enough," as he would have expressed it, to keep to windward of the law. "Smartness," in fact, was his gospel. He preached it morning, noon, and night to his son. Had Freeman had a different sort of father, he might have been a different sort of boy. But his mother having died when he was but a small lad, he had fallen exclusively to his father's care. Stonington Hunt had brought his son up to believe it was disgraceful to be poor, and doubly disgraceful to fail in anything one set out to do. Principle, the elder Hunt had none, and he had

taught his son that a sense of honor was a useless encumbrance. Such was the man who rang Mrs. Perkins's front door bell and greeted her with overdone effusiveness.

"Is Paul in?" he asked, after he had introduced himself and expressed his intense gratification at meeting such a charming lady.

Poor Mrs. Perkins, all in a flutter, invited her glittering guest into the front parlor, drew up the shades, which were rarely raised, and rejoined that Paul was still at school, but would be home shortly.

"Perhaps it is just as well," smiled Mr. Hunt, displaying a row of white, gleaming teeth. "He is but a lad, and I have come to talk over something which, perhaps, a woman of the world, an intelligent woman like yourself, is more competent to discuss than a mere boy."

"Paul is a mighty bright boy," remarked Mrs. Perkins, bridling somewhat in defense of Paul, but coloring and simpering with pleasure at the compliment paid to her.

"Exactly," agreed Mr. Hunt amiably; "a very

bright boy. A credit to the town, madam. But Paul has been hiding his light under a bushel, so to speak. He has not been radiating the effulgence of inventive genius as he should; he has been—in short,” concluded Mr. Hunt, “Paul needs bringing out.”

“Bringing out?” gasped Mrs. Perkins, to whom much of this had been so much Greek.

“Just so, my dear Mrs. Perkins, and I—Stonington Hunt—am the man to do it. Why, I understand that at this very moment he has in your stables a remarkable—I may say, a wonderful invention.”

Mrs. Perkins had never heard the wagon house referred to as “stables” before, and, quite carried away by this glittering gentleman’s kindly interest and his magnificent manner, she rejoined that Paul had got “something of some sort” out there.

“Something, my dear madam,” glowed Mr. Hunt; “it is more than a something. It is an achievement. My boy Freeman—a dear friend of your son’s—told me about it—there’s no ob-

jection to my seeing it, I hope. I called on purpose."

"Why, I—really, sir, I don't know if Paul would like it," palpitated Mrs. Perkins. "You see, he—he is very particular about letting anybody see the invention. He's trying for a patent on it at Washington now."

"Ah, then it is not yet patented?" There was an eager catch in Mr. Hunt's voice. For an instant his composed manner seemed to lose its icy calm. But in a moment he was himself again. "He should certainly get it patented at once, madam," he went on, in his usual oily tones—"which brings us at once to the point. I am here to offer him a price for his invention if it seems at all practicable."

"Oh, sir!" gasped Mrs. Perkins, quite overcome. "You would buy it?"

"Yes, madam, I, Stonington Hunt, will buy it. I am prepared to offer," he paused as if in doubt whether to mention the sum in one breath, "one hundred dollars for the exclusive right to manufacture it."

"A hundred dollars!" exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, who had seen few lump sums of money since her husband had died. "Why, sir, it is only a plaything of the boy's."

"If you will let me see it, I will judge of that," put in Mr. Hunt softly. "Can we not go out to your stable and view it now?"

"Why, I—Paul has the key," stammered Mrs. Perkins.

"Confound the brat!" muttered Mr. Hunt, and then aloud he purred: "But you have another one, my dear madam, I don't doubt."

"Yes," confessed Mrs. Perkins; "there is one on my dead husband's key ring. But I don't know if Paul would like it. You see——"

"My dear madam," put in Mr. Hunt, in his most impressive manner, "I am a man of the world, you are a woman of the world. Do we not know better than children what is best for them? I ask you, madam, as a woman of experience, do we not?"

"I—I—yes, I suppose so," trembled Mrs. Per-

kins, quite carried away by all this. "If you'll wait a second, sir, I'll get the key."

"Oh, dear, I do hope Paul won't be mad," she thought, as she hastened upstairs on her errand.

"Easier than I thought," muttered Mr. Hunt, gazing intently at the pink-eyed china dog with blue spots that stood upon the mantel. "If the machine is what Freeman described it to be, there should be money in it, and where there is money, there you'll find Stonington Hunt."

Mrs. Perkins, with a shawl thrown over her head, was soon downstairs again.

"Now, sir," she said, preparing to lead the way, but as they emerged from the door and started to take the brick path leading to the wagon house, a sudden sound of approaching boyish voices was heard.

"Why, here comes Paul now, with three of his friends," exclaimed Mrs. Perkins, gazing across the white picket fence and up the street.

"Confound the luck," ground out Mr. Hunt, with a very unangelic expression on his face, "it

will need all my tact to carry this through if the cub proves obstinate."

"Well, madam," he said inquiringly, the next minute, as Mrs. Perkins still lingered by the fence.

"Oh, sir, I'll leave it all to Paul now," gasped Mrs. Perkins, secretly glad to be relieved of the responsibility. "Let him show his what-you-may-call-um off. He can do it better than I could. He understands it."

With a shrug, Mr. Hunt bowed, and Mrs. Perkins turned to re-enter the house. At that moment Paul, with Rob, Merritt, and Tubby about him, came through the gate. He seemed excited. His cheeks were flushed. In his hand he held a yellow piece of paper.

"Hooray, mother!" he cried. "News from Washington. They gave me this telegram as we passed the office. It just came."

"Is it good news, my boy?" asked Mrs. Perkins solicitously.

"The very best!" cried the boy, in a delighted, happy tone. "Mr. Merrill tells me that he has

interested the government in my invention in connection with its being used on the South Polar expedition."

"That is good news, indeed, my boy!" cried his mother joyously. "But, Paul, all this time we have been forgetting that there is a gentleman waiting to see you. Mr. Hunt, this is my boy, and these are his friends, Rob Blake, Merritt Crawford, and Tub—I mean Robert Hopkins."

"I have heard of Rob Blake," said Mr. Hunt, coming forward with a scowl. "I have heard of his friends, too. My business is with your lad, Mrs. Perkins."

"I'm afraid, sir, that it won't be much good now," said Mrs. Perkins, vanishing.

As soon as she had gone, Mr. Hunt "opened fire." He had decided in his own mind that a quick, decisive manner would succeed best with the quiet, dreamy Paul, so he called him aside with an imperative gesture.

"Come here, boy, I wish to speak with you," he said, smiling with inward satisfaction as he noted how quickly the inventive lad obeyed the

summons. Rob, Tubby, and Merritt, their books under their arms, stood near the gate.

"I don't like the look of the father any more than I do the son," declared Tubby emphatically.

"Wonder what he wants with Paul?" mused Rob as he watched the former Wall Street luminary link his arm familiarly in the boy's and walk off with him, talking earnestly. They waited patiently, and presently Paul came hurrying toward them with a wondering face. His eyes were round.

"Say, fellows," he exclaimed, "Mr. Hunt has offered me a thousand dollars for the exclusive rights to the motor-scooter—what do you think of it?"

"What can they think of it but that it is a splendid offer," put in Mr. Hunt, coming up. "Why, I have made it without even seeing the machine."

"But you overheard about the dispatch from Washington," put in Rob quietly.

"Confound this boy. He's too sharp," thought Mr. Hunt, whose desire to obtain the rights to

the machine had increased greatly since Paul had imprudently announced his news from the capital.

"I am willing to give this lad a royalty interest in the sales, supposing the machine is practicable," he said, in as conciliatory a tone as he could adopt toward what were, in his lofty opinion, "a bunch of green kids."

"What do you think, Rob?" asked Paul, his eyes glowing.

"You will excuse us a minute, Mr. Hunt?" said Rob, and then, drawing his excited young friend to one side, he began to talk to him earnestly. The gist of Rob's advice was that Paul would be very silly to close any sort of a deal in a hurry. His father's friend in Washington was evidently doing all that lay in his power to further his interests, and if such a shrewd citizen as Mr. Hunt was willing to make such an offer on snap judgment, the machine must, in reality, be worth much more.

"Well," said Mr. Hunt, with a ghastly effort

at a pleasant smile, "I trust that David has given good counsel to Jonathan?"

"Why, sir," blurted out Paul. "I don't believe I care to do anything in the matter to-day."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Hunt. "You refuse my magnificent offer?"

"You see, Paul is very young, sir," put in Rob, "and he's not quite sure that it *is* magnificent."

"I do not recognize you in this matter, boy!" majestically declared Mr. Hunt, who was rapidly losing his temper. What he had thought would be a simple matter was turning out to be far more complex than he had imagined.

"At any rate," he said, conquering his rage with an effort, and turning to Paul with a smile that was meant to be amiable, but which was positively wolfish; "at any rate, you will allow a poor, inquisitive mortal to see this marvelous craft?"

"Don't you do it," prompted Tubby, in a loud whisper.

Hunt overheard, and turned quick as a flash.

"I should think that a boy of your brains and

ability, Paul, would not allow himself to be led by the nose by a lot of impudent puppies——”

“Or scheming promoters,” put in Rob quietly.

“How dare you, sir! Do you mean to insinuate——”

“I don’t insinuate anything. The insinuation is your own,” was the quiet reply.

“Are you going to show me this machine, boy?” shouted Mr. Hunt, his temper now fairly gone. Had Stonington Hunt possessed control of his rage, he might have been many times a millionaire, but his ungovernable temper had lost him many a good chance, as he termed them.

“Why—no, I don’t believe I care to,” quavered Paul, rather undecidedly. “You see, it isn’t patented yet, and——”

“Shut up!” hissed Tubby anxiously. He did not know that Mr. Hunt was already in possession of this important piece of knowledge.

“You brats make me tired,” snarled the former broker viciously. He turned with angry emphasis and flourished his stick, striding toward the gate.

Tubby politely held it open for him. The broad grin on his face was unmistakable. It infuriated Hunt to a still greater degree.

"Stonington Hunt was never beaten yet," he snapped, "and when he is, it won't be by a bunch of half-baked school kids. You, sir"—turning angrily on Tubby—"go to blazes!"

"After you," exclaimed the fat boy, with a low bow, and holding the gate open to its fullest extent.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ARMY AIRSHIP.

LIEUTENANT DUVALL proved as good as his word. One afternoon, not long before cold weather set in in real earnest, Rob received word that if, on the ensuing Saturday, he and his two chums would call at the old mansion they would be enabled to see for themselves the aeroplane with which the army was experimenting, Lieutenant Duvall having been selected to make the tests. If the weather proved right, the note added, there was even a possibility that a short flight might be attempted, just to show the boys something of the newest idea in army equipment.

"Gee, I envy you fellows," said Paul Perkins wistfully, when he heard of the contemplated excursion. "I'd give anything to see an aeroplane in action."

"Maybe you will get a chance," said Rob kindly, and when the banker's son reached home

that night he 'phoned to Lieutenant Duvall to know if he could bring along a member of the Eagle Patrol who was deeply interested in aeronautics. The reply was in the affirmative, and Paul's delight was huge when he received word that he could be one of the party.

"I never saw a real aeroplane except in a picture before," he exclaimed, "and if I can get a good look at one, I'm going to try to work out an idea I've got in my head."

"What's that, Mister Edison, Junior?" teased Tubby.

The boys were gathered in the wagon shed in which the wonderful, though untried, motor-scooter stood, awaiting the days when the Inlet would be frozen over for its trial trip.

"Well," said Paul, rather diffidently, "I'm afraid you fellows will laugh at me if I tell you what it is."

"No, we won't," Merritt assured him, tossing the core of a red-cheeked apple out of the open door.

"We'll be mum as oysters," chimed in Rob. "Go ahead, Paul, unfold thy mar-velous plan."

"It's a sort of variation on the ice motor car," explained Paul. "It came to me last year when we were sledding down Jones's hill outside the village. It's just this, why couldn't a fellow fit a sled with a pair of wings?"

"Gee whiz!" groaned Tubby, pretending to roll off the empty nail keg on which he was seated, and tapping his forehead meaningly. "Another bright young mind gone—clean gone."

"Go ahead, Paul. Never mind him. He's got a rush of fat to the head," laughed Merritt reassuringly, for the diffident Paul had stopped and colored up at the stout youth's ridicule.

"You know," explained Paul, "that a sled gets an awful impetus on a long glide down a hill. Now, if only one could fix wings or planes to it firmly enough, and equip it with a balancing tail, I don't see why you couldn't make a skimmer."

"Well, you might do it if you didn't break your neck first," chuckled Tubby. "Guess I'll stick to the earth for a while."

"You're too fat to do anything else," chortled Rob. "But seriously, Paul, the idea sounds as if it might be worked out. Maybe the aeroplane will give you some ideas."

"I hope so," said Paul. "I'd like to try it as soon as we get any sleighing."

"Boo-hoo! Boo-hoo!" burst out Tubby, rocking back and forth. "And he's so young to die!"

When the laugh, in which Paul could not help joining, had subsided, Rob spoke up.

"Seen any more of Freeman Hunt's father?" he asked.

"Not a sign of him," rejoined Paul. "I guess he's given up the idea of getting an interest in my machine. What worries me a whole lot, though, is that I've heard nothing more from Washington."

"Cheer up!" comforted Rob. "I've heard my dad say that it takes a year to do in Washington what could be done anywhere else in a month."

"That's why it takes the Washingtons so long to get within peeking view of the pennant," chuc-

kled Tubby, who was a close student of baseball scores.

With what anxiety the weather was watched on the Saturday upon which the visit to the old mansion was to be paid may be imagined. To the boys' delight, it dawned fair and clear, with just enough of a sharp tang in the air to make it pleasant. The boys had an early lunch and then set out for the place.

"Too bad the inlet isn't frozen, and then we could skim along in Paul's wonderful wind-jammer," grumbled Tubby, who was somewhat averse to walking.

It so happened that their way lay past the farm of Jack Curtiss, and, as they passed it, they saw that hulking lad strolling about the place, smoking a cigarette. In the rear of the comfortable, old-fashioned house, his father could also be seen, hard at work splitting and piling wood with the hired man to help him.

Curtiss stared at the lads as they swung by, but made no move to come toward them. By this time he, of course, knew how the adventure

of the attack of Dugan and the Jap had turned out, and seemingly he had no wish to test the lads' knowledge of who had instigated it.

About half a mile beyond the Curtiss farm lay the estate of one Horatio Jeffords, among whose possessions was a large and ferocious bull, which had given trouble on more than one occasion to passers by. For this reason, Jeffords usually kept him tied up. As the boys swung around a turn in the road and the stone-walled way lay straight in front of them for some distance, they perceived, running toward them at top speed, two girls.

"Those girls are running as if they were scared of something," exclaimed Merritt, as they came rushing toward the boys.

The words had hardly left his lips before the lads saw what had alarmed them. Galloping across the field, with head lowered and froth flecking from his mouth, was Horatio Jeffords' savage bull. He was emitting angry roars as he dashed on toward the girls, one of whom, the boys could now see, was wearing a red sweater.

"Oh, the bull! The bull! He'll kill us!" they cried shrilly as they neared the boys.

Indeed it looked as if the creature was bent on inflicting serious injury upon the wearer of the flaming article of wear, which had first attracted his attention.

He leaped the low stone wall separating the pasture lot from the road as nimbly as if he had been a three-year-old colt. Then on he came, his alarming bellow ringing out shrilly and angrily. In a few seconds he was not more than a few feet behind the girls.

With a wild cry one of them stumbled and fell, and the next instant the infuriated creature would have been upon her, goring her and stamping out her life. But a sudden interruption occurred.

A boyish figure, with coat off and waving in his hand, made a rapid leap forward, and before the amazed bull could turn to attack this new foe, his vision was suddenly blindfolded.

A coat had been thrown with deadly accuracy through the air and had settled on the animal's

horns. Its folds hung down over his eyes, bewildering him and shutting off his sight. The animal shook his head and emitted angry roars, but the more he endeavored to throw the coat off, the closer it hung to his horns.

"Get the girls out of the way!" shouted Rob, as coatless and flushed with his brave exertion, he stood in the center of the road. But Merritt and Tubby already had one girl upon her feet, and the other stood a short distance down the road. Both were pale and trembling at the imminence of the danger they had escaped.

"Oh, thank you!" exclaimed the girl whom Rob had saved by his quick presence of mind. The bull, with a wild bellow, swung round and went staggering off in the opposite direction, trying in vain to rid himself of the bewildering coat.

"At least—that is, I mean to say, I don't know how to thank you," she went on.

"Oh, glad to have been of service," said Rob gallantly, as the other girl came up and began adding her thanks and praise to that of her companion.

"If you hadn't worn that red sweater, you wouldn't have attracted his attention," quoth Tubby sagely.

"I know, but they are the fashion this fall, and, then, too, we had no idea that a wild bull would be rushing around loose like that."

"I think I know who you boys are," said the wearer of the red sweater, who now seemed quite recovered from her fright. "You are Rob Blake and Tub—Mr. Hopkins and Merritt Crawford."

"And Paul Perkins, the well-known inventor," grinned Tubby.

"I guess you have the advantage of us," rejoined Rob.

The girl laughed merrily at his embarrassment.

"I am Dale Harding's sister," she said. "I only got home from the West two days ago, and my friend is a sister of Freeman Hunt's."

"Wow!" Tubby exclaimed, in low voice. Then he went on: "I don't believe Miss Hunt has been here very long."

"No, indeed. I only arrived about a week

ago," said the young lady herself. "I have been at a finishing school up the Hudson. I think it's much nicer here, though," she added.

"Not if you have many more experiences like that," laughed Rob.

"Oh, I don't know. If there are always some nice boys about to help us, I shouldn't mind, should you, May?"

"Not a bit," confessed Dale Harding's sister. "But come Helen, we must be walking on or we shall be late for that appointment."

At this juncture, Horatio Jeffords himself, red-faced and panting, came in view. He was carrying Rob's coat.

"Cal-kerlated I'd ketch yer here," he puffed. "I'm glad you kep' that pesky Hercules from doin' any harm. Had him tied up and can't figure how in Sam Hill he got erway."

He handed the coat to Rob, explaining that the bull had caught it in some brambles and shaken it off.

"I hope he is safely tied up now," said Helen

Hunt. "I thought every minute the dreadful creature would toss me on his horns."

"The men hev got him up ter ther barn," Jeffords assured her. "I'll hitch him with er chain this time, you kin bet yer boots."

Soon after the two parties separated, the girls hastening toward Hampton and the boys walking off with Farmer Jeffords, as he was going in their direction a short distance.

"What nice boys," said Helen, as she and May Harding walked along. "Not a bit like what our brothers told us about them."

"I told you when they were pointed out to us at the post office last night that they couldn't be as mean as Freeman and Dale tried to make out," responded Helen. "They are awfully brave, too."

"I hope we'll get to know them better," went on Dale Harding's sister.

"If it depends on our brothers we won't," Helen Hunt assured her.

In the meantime, the boys had parted from Farmer Jeffords.

"Say, those girls are all right," declared Rob enthusiastically, as they strode on.

"Ho! ho! ho!" laughed Tubby. "Rob is smitten."

"You needn't talk," retorted Rob, with a red face. "You were bowing and scraping around like a dancing master yourself. Yes, and Merritt, too."

"I was only trying to be polite," protested Merritt indignantly.

"Pity they're not somebody else's sisters," grunted Tubby mischievously, dodging a clip on the ear which Rob reached out to give him.

It was not long before the dark hemlocks of the De Regny mansion came into view. From the summit of the little hill on which they stood the boys could see the broad, smooth terrace and the sparkle of the sea beyond. Hardly a breath stirred the air.

"Guess we'll have a flight, all right," exclaimed Paul Perkins enthusiastically. "Look! They're busy down yonder."

Sure enough they could see several small

speck-like figures moving about below them, opening the big double doors of the green shed.

"Race you to the bottom of the hill!" shouted Rob, and off dashed the Boy Scouts, running as if their lives depended on it.

CHAPTER XII.

TUBBY ESCAPES AN ORANGE BOMB.

Whir-r-r-r-r!

What a terrific din the aeroplane's engine created, as the white-winged cloud skimmer stood outside the green shed! -It was all the four soldiers, hanging on to her stern braces, could do to hold the struggling machine back. It appeared a thing instinct with life, eager and striving to get free and try its broad pinions against the blue.

The boys stood with round eyes and beating hearts, watching while Lieutenant Duvall tuned up the powerful one-hundred horse-power motor. A smell of burned lubricants filled the air. Clouds of oily, blue smoke rolled from the exhausts, which spat lambent flames viciously as the powerful motor vibrated.

To the soldiers standing about it was an old story, but to the boys everything was new and wonderful. As Lieutenant Duvall stopped the

motor to adjust a spark plug connection, they pressed forward to examine the craft. Paul, as may be imagined, was as interested in the smallest wire and coupling as he was in the mighty engine or the broad white planes.

Suddenly the small boy gave an exclamation.

"Look here, sir!" he cried to the lieutenant.

The officer hastened to his side. Paul was examining one of the cross wires. The filament, made of the stoutest drawn steel, formed an important brace to the upper plane. The lad's sharp eyes had detected that the soldering of its connection was almost worn through.

"Good for you, boy!" exclaimed the officer, as he saw the defect to which Paul had called attention. "That would have given me a bad tumble if you *hadn't* noticed it. Here, Mulloy"—addressing one of the soldiers—"get me the soldering outfit. Quick, now!"

With soldierly alertness, the man was off on his errand. Lieutenant Duvall employed the time of his absence explaining the various details of the machine to the boys.

"How about the equalizer?" asked Rob.

"It is not attached to-day," explained the officer. "The main object of the device is to steady the plane when the operator desires to launch an explosive from his seat. He naturally has to shift, and the equalizer is to take up that shifting motion and distribute it."

"I see," nodded Tubby sagaciously, although it is doubtful if the fat boy did.

"Then you are going to practice dropping explosives?" asked Rob.

The officer's face took on a queer expression.

"I guess we'll have to call that an army secret, my boy," he said. "If all goes well, Hampton may become a famous place."

With this mysterious utterance, the boys had to be content. Mulloy returned at this moment with the solder, and the lieutenant adjusted the weak spot as skilfully as a machinist.

"An aviator has to know how to do everything about his engine," he explained; "supposing he should drop in a country without a machine shop in reaching distance, or in any enemy's country,

if he couldn't make his own repairs, he would be in a bad fix."

"Are all these men trained in that way?" inquired Rob.

Lieutenant Duvall nodded.

"Every one of them," he said. "They are all from Fort Myer. So was that deserting rascal, Dugan. He was the most expert mechanic I ever saw. In fact, I have heard since his desertion that there was good reason for his skill. Under the name of Beasley, he was one of the best-known safe crackers in the country before he reformed and entered the army with an assumed name. He was a splendid workman, though."

The officer gave a sigh over the dereliction of Dugan. His professional side was affected by the man's rascality.

"Nothing has been heard of him since he deserted?" asked Rob.

"Not a thing," rejoined the officer, buckling on his leggings and adjusting his queer-shaped,

padded cap, with goggles attached to its front part.

A few seconds later he was in the driver's seat, and had his hands on the two levers which, by quadrants and chains, controlled the warping of the wings and rudder. The engine controls also led from these levers, while the motor could be stopped altogether by a motion of the foot on a small metal pedal.

Two soldiers ran to the propeller, a six-foot affair, and began swinging it "against the compression" of the motor. After a few rocks of the two-bladed driving apparatus, an explosion burst from the motor, and presently it was roaring away at full blast. A squad of men held it back, however, awaiting the aviator's signal to "let go."

At last it came—a backward sweep of one gauntleted hand.

Whir-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r!

Like some scared live thing, the winged man-bird shot forward, scuttling over the smooth surface of the bricked terrace. Absolutely en-

thrilled, the boys stood, with eyes as big as saucers and their mouths half open, in blank astonishment. As the contrivance, after a short scud, began to lift, they broke into an involuntary cheer. The next instant a distance of several feet interposed between the flying machine and the ground. With a graceful turn, the officer brought his flier round, and now came roaring through the air directly above the boys' heads. As he did so, he gave a shout, and before the astonished onlookers could utter a sound, a round, yellow object came hurtling down at them.

"A bomb! Look out!" yelled one of the soldiers, with well-assumed terror, leaping backward.

In his haste to avoid the explosion of the yellow globe, Tubby fairly fell over and went rolling along the smooth ground like a ball. Rob and the others jumped back with blanched cheeks and frightened eyes, in scarcely less haste. Evidently, by accident, the officer had dropped a deadly explosive—or so it seemed.

The next instant, however, a roar of laughter went up at the boys' expense.

What had been dropped was an orange. It struck the ground with a terrific splash, scattering juice and pulp in all directions. It was a little joke of the lieutenant's, who frequently used oranges or eggs at bomb-dropping practice.

The relieved boys could hear his merry laugh as he sailed by, far above them, and rapidly soared higher in the air.

"Huh! Won't get me that way again," grunted Tubby, as, amid a roar of laughter, he picked up his rotund form and joined the others.

For half an hour or more the officer swooped and circled above them, appearing to delight in the exercise as much as a wheeling hawk on a summer's day. Then he descended, and made a landing on the terrace as neatly as if he had just driven up in an automobile. Springs, geared to the pneumatic-tired wheels, broke the force of the landing, and, after one or two light bounces, the machine came to a standstill.

"Your turn," cried the officer, laughing and

turning to Rob as the machine, for the time being, terminated its flight.

He indicated a seat beside him, with an upright back and covered with dark-green padding. Rob did not hesitate, but stepped boldly forward. One of the soldiers offered him a pair of goggles, which he drew on. Then he climbed into the seat and gripped the side handles tightly.

"I'll break the news to your folks," howled Tubby, but the rest of his jocose remarks were drowned in the roar of the motor. The next instant they were off. Rob's breath seemed to be forced backward down his throat by the rapidity of the motion. He gasped and choked, and hung onto his hand rails till the paint flaked off against his palms. The aeroplane, before it arose, seemed to act just like a bucking broncho. Its motions reminded Rob very much of the cayuse he had ridden at Harry Harkness' ranch on that memorable morning when the cowpunchers gathered to see his battle with the broncho.

Suddenly, however, the see-saw motion

changed to a delightful, gliding sensation. It felt like riding along upon the softest feather mattress in the world. They had left the ground and were actually flying. Rob's heart gave a bound at the idea. He was certainly the first boy in the vicinity of Hampton to have such an experience. His first flash of fear had left him now, and he glanced at the officer seated beside him. Lieutenant Duvall's face was calm and unperturbed, and Rob felt ashamed of the feeling of fright he had experienced before the machine took the air.

Up and up they rose. Once Rob looked down, but he didn't do it any more. Somehow it made him feel pale and empty to realize that between his shoe soles and the ground lay a quarter of a mile of empty space.

"Keep your eyes ahead," the officer advised, and Rob thereafter did so.

But his ride was not destined to become monotonous with such an aviator as the army officer at the levers. Suddenly the machine gave a downward, forward dip, and began rushing to

the ground, or rather the ground appeared to be rushing up toward it.

It was all Rob could do to keep from crying out. He firmly believed that an accident had happened and that they would be dashed to bits when the aeroplane struck the ground. His mouth grew dry with terror, and he could have no longer checked a terrified shout, when all at once the motion ceased; or, rather, it altered. The descent was checked when within twenty feet of the ground, and up and round they swung, landing a few minutes after as lightly as a wafted feather upon the broad, smooth terrace of the De Regny mansion. How the old marshal would have gasped if he could have witnessed the antics of this new weapon of warfare cavorting above his ancient domain, from which he had watched so many weary days for his emperor.

"Well?" said the officer, with a twinkle in his eye as Rob, a bit shaky still from his terrible fright, clambered to the ground.

"Well," rejoined Rob, taking off his goggles,

"It was pretty strenuous work, but I enjoyed every minute of it."

"Now for your friends," said the officer, but Tubby had strangely vanished, and only Meritt and Paul could avail themselves of the invitation. They both enjoyed rides, and Paul proved so apt a young aviator that on a second trip aloft he was even allowed to handle the levers, at a safe distance above the ground, however.

"You boys certainly have plenty of pluck," said the officer, after the sport of the afternoon was over. "Some day I may take you for a cross-country ride, or when we start real bomb-dropping work——"

He stopped abruptly and smiled.

"I forgot—that's a service secret," he said mystifyingly.

Not until the aeroplane was safely housed did Tubby emerge, and then he had to undergo a fine cross fire of joshing, you may be sure.

"I don't care," philosophically remarked the stout youth to himself; "I'm not built for flying,

and walking is good enough for me, unless I can own an automobile."

When Rob reached home that evening his mother told him that there was a visitor to see him.

"He is in the library," she said.

Rob hastily removed the grime and dirt of his aerial trip, and, wondering who the caller could be, hastened into the room in which the guest was waiting. He gave a cry of surprise, as, in the twilight, he recognized Dale Harding.

"I've come to talk things over," said Freeman Hunt's particular chum, extending a hand. Rob took it and shook it heartily.

"All right, Dale," he said, "fire away."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT HAPPENED IN THE WOODS.

"My sister told me all about it," burst out Dale, plunging into the object of his mission without any preliminary skirmishing. "It was a mighty brave thing to do, Rob."

"Rot!" rejoined Rob. "It was just a Boy Scout good turn. Say no more about it, old fellow."

"But I must," hurriedly went on Dale, bringing out his words rapidly, as if he had nerved himself to the performance of an unpleasant, but necessary task. "I—I want to tell you, Rob, that I feel pretty small and cheap and mean over the way I've let those fellows jolly me into annoying you."

"That's all right, Dale. Never mind about what's past," Rob said; "but in the future let's make this talk have some good effect. Let the Hawks and the Eagles get together. I know

that the rank and file of the Hawks are friendly toward us, and——”

“You bet they are,” blurted out Dale. “It’s only Hunt’s influence that drew them apart, and it’s this same influence that’s keeping them there. We could get together to-morrow if it wasn’t for Hunt and one or two of his cronies. I’m ashamed to think that I was one of them, but it’s over now. I’m disgusted with Hunt—through with him for good.”

Rob saw that the boy was agitated by something more than the mere mention of Hunt’s name. He appeared to be anxious to say something more, but apparently it stuck in his throat.

“Why, what has Hunt done recently to make you so disgusted with him?” asked Rob, by way of giving the other a lead.

“Why, don’t you know?” exclaimed Dale; “haven’t you guessed who put up that job on you when that soldier and the Jap attacked you?”

“I’ve often wondered how they came to know we would be traveling by that road,” said Rob.

"It puzzled me a good deal, but I attributed it to accident, for lack of a better explanation."

"It was no accident," Dale assured him. "Hunt and Jack Curtiss found that a secret passage ran from the beach to the grounds of the old De Regny house. They sneaked through it the day that you were out there, and lay in a clump of bushes close behind you while you talked. They thought they saw a chance to get even and hastened off to set those two fellows on you."

"The dickens they did!" exclaimed the other. "That explains a whole lot that wasn't clear before. Hunt is a worse young rascal than I thought him."

"He certainly is," agreed Dale. "I was disgusted clear through when they told me about it, and said so. But Hunt and the others threatened to do me up if I said anything to you, so I kept quiet for a while. But when my sister told me that it was you who had rescued them from that bull of Jeffords', I just had to come and see you,

and tell you how sorry I was. I hope you'll be friends."

"Of course, I will," said Rob heartily, "and I hope we can make this a means of getting the two patrols together."

"The only stumbling block now is Freeman Hunt. He'll do all he can to work against us," went on Dale.

"Don't see that he can do much," rejoined Rob, after a few minutes of thought. "If the patrol doesn't want him and can show good cause why he should not be at the head of the Hawks, they can appeal to the scoutmasters and elect a successor."

After some more talk the two boys separated, but that conversation proved the beginning of the end for Freeman Hunt. A proposal was made to him some days later to adjust the differences between the Hawks and the Eagles, but he stubbornly refused to retreat from his position. In the meantime, the scoutmasters, Mr. Blake and Commodore Wingate, had heard something of the difficulties of the two patrols, and the result

was a peremptory order to Hunt to adjust all differences at once.

"I'll quit first," grunted Hunt, when this news was conveyed to him. "That kid Blake wants to own the earth."

The leader of the Hawks finally was as good as his word, and, after a stormy scene in their armory, he strode out of the organization. Soon after Dale Harding was elected to the leadership in his place. Lem Lonsdale and Hunt's other cronies, refusing to follow their leader out, still remained, however, as sources of trouble. Thus, for the time being, ended Freeman Hunt's association with the Boy Scouts. But he was not the sort of lad to accept defeat any more easily than his father. It was noticed that soon after his resignation from the ranks of the Hawks, Hunt, Jack Curtiss, and Bill Bender formed an inseparable triumvirate, but for a time they gave no sign of making mischief.

With the first sprinkle of snow, the boys of Hampton began to get out their guns—those of them who possessed any—and little was talked

of but rabbit hunting and the merits and demerits of various hounds. The aeroplane experiment grounds were closed till spring, only a small detachment of soldiers being left behind to look after things, and see that no one molested the place. Old Captain Hudgins, as was his winter habit, had deserted his island, except for occasional visits, and would not go back to it till the early spring. In the meantime, he meant to pass the chilly months in a small cottage lying a little outside Hampton to the east. Of course, it was right on the coast, for the captain could not bear to be out of sight or sound of the sea.

One Saturday Rob and his inseparable companions set out for the woods with their guns, determined to bring home enough rabbits for three separate stews. Their way led them up over Jones's Hill, where Paul meant to try out his winged sled when opportunity offered, past a few scattered dwellings on the outskirts of the town, and then into a tangle of woods and brush interspersed with sandy clearings covered with dried, brown grass.

Separating, they started through the woods, and every now and then the report of a shotgun rang out sharply on the frosty air. It was evident that they were having good sport, or at least getting plenty of shots.

Hardly had they disappeared into the brush before another group of hunters, leading a big liver-and-white pointer on leash, emerged into the roadway from a clump of bushes, behind which they had ducked as the three boys came into view.

The trio that had so suddenly appeared from what was, apparently, a hiding place consisted of Freeman Hunt, Jack Curtiss, and Bill Bender. All carried guns, and four rabbits carried by Jack showed that they had had some success.

"I suppose those brats are going to scare everything within five miles now," muttered Jack, as they watched the Boy Scouts vanish into the woods. "They're a fine bunch of hunters. I'll bet there isn't one of them could hit a barn door if he were locked in."

"That's right," muttered Freeman Hunt, in a

surly tone. "Young muckers, I owe them a long score, and they'll have to settle it before long."

"Yes, they did kind of knock you down and then rub it in, didn't they?" grinned Bill Bender, fumbling with the breech of his gun.

Freeman did not relish this reference to his recent troubles, and an angry flush rose to his cheeks as he burst out:

"That's the worst thing they ever did. I'll get even with them if it's the last thing I do. I haven't thought up anything yet, but I will, and don't you forget it. I hate them all."

"Well, no use letting them have all the sport," rejoined Jack Curtiss. "Let's cut into the wood here, and then the old dog can nose up all the game they drive this way."

By mid-afternoon Rob found himself alone, in a small clearing, surrounded with scrub oak and sea-stunted pines—a vegetation peculiar to that region.

He paused to listen for some sound of his companions, and, as he did so, he heard, quite

near at hand, as it seemed, a crashing sound in the brush.

"That you, fellows?" he called out; but there was no answer, and in place of the crackling of the brush there was dead silence. Somewhere, far off, he could hear the steady blows of a woodsman's axe, but that was the only interruption to the silence of the winter's afternoon.

"Maybe it was a deer," reflected Rob, as no answer came to his call. "They get off that millionaire Grogan's place once in a while. Guess that must have been one."

He looked down at the two rabbits he held.

"Not much for an afternoon's work," he smiled. "But they'll have to do."

The sun was beginning to sink quite low, and Rob thought to himself that he would have to be getting back. He was turning with this object in view when a sudden sound behind him attracted his attention, and a big liver-and-white pointer ran through the clearing. Its nose was on the ground and it paid no attention to him.

"Somebody else hunting round here," thought

Rob. "Queer, though, I've heard no other shots."

A moment later he plunged into the brush, striking out toward the southwest. As he entered the tangle, and, bending low, began pushing his way through it with his broad, young shoulders, something happened.

A flash of fire, so close that it almost singed his hair, followed by a deafening report, and the whistle and spatter of shot among the leaves, brought him to halt with a gasp at his narrow escape.

Some one had fired a shotgun almost in his ear. A fraction of an inch and he would have been badly wounded, if not killed. As he stood there, angry at the unknown hunter's carelessness and palpitating with the sudden shock, there came a great crashing in the brush. Somebody was evidently making off at top speed. Perhaps it was the man who had caused the accident.

"Hi!" shouted Rob, finding his voice at last. "Hi! come back there, you! You pretty nearly shot me."

But the crashing kept on. Evidently whoever had fired the shot was in hot haste to escape.

"That's a fine way to sneak out of a careless accident," exclaimed Rob indignantly, hurling his voice after the unknown.

A sudden hot wave of suspicion and anger swept over him as he spoke. Was it an accident? Would any one who had come so close to jeopardizing a human life dash off like a detected criminal? Would he not stand his ground and explain matters?

Sorely perplexed, Rob stood a while listening to the further sounds of the retreating individual who had imperiled him. As he paused, rooted to the spot, something flashed across his path and vanished the same way as had the mysterious shooter. It was the same liver-and-white pointer he had noticed before.

"You belong to him," exclaimed Rob, as the dog vanished. "I never saw you before, but I'll know you if we meet again."

CHAPTER XIV.

MR. HUNT DELIVERS A TELEGRAM.

THE morning after Rob's narrow escape, Stonington Hunt entered the Western Union office in Hampton in some excitement and filed a telegram. It was addressed to a former business friend of his, and related to what progress he had made in acquiring the right to manufacture Paul Perkins's queer machine. Had it told the truth, it would have said, "Little hope." But that was not the elder Hunt's way. His dispatch read:

"Progress favorable. Think I can land it."

As Hunt handed the message over to Blinky Dibbs, the operator, messenger boy and manager of the office, he smile grimly.

"Afraid there's more poetry than truth in that message," he said to himself, "but I'm not going to give up hope. The more I think of it, the more I'm convinced there is money in that motor

ice sleigh. Why, one could sell them like hot cakes at winter resorts, and there's that government contract for the Polar expedition. Stonington, my boy, you've got to get your hands on that machine."

At this point of his meditations, his eyes fell on an undelivered message lying on the key table before the operator. The former financier's sharp eyes scanned it greedily. As he comprehended what the dispatch was, his brow clouded angrily. The message was for Paul Perkins, and read as follows:

"Things here satisfactory, but Washington moves slowly. On no account consider other offer. Confident I can put deal with government through. Merrill."

"Phew!" whistled Hunt, in a low key. "So that's the way the wind blows." He wrinkled his brow for a minute in deep thought, and, as Mr. Hunt's thoughts usually materialized speedily into action, he did not remain long in meditation. He pulled a "receiving blank" toward him and rapidly wrote on it. Then he slipped it

in an envelope and, having written an address on it, pocketed it.

"Get my message off yet, Dibbs?" he inquired, although his sharp eyes had seen that the operator had not yet succeeded in raising the New York office.

"Nope," responded Blinky, pounding away at "N. Y."

"Well, I guess I'm off," volunteered Mr. Hunt, with his most amiable smile. "Got any messages you wish delivered in the direction in which I'm going?"

"Which way is that?" asked Blinky, keeping up his clickety-click.

"Down Beach Street. I have some business at Paul Perkins's house."

"Say, that's so!" exclaimed Blinky, galvanizing into remembrance. "I've got a message here for young Perkins. Would you mind taking it?"

"With pleasure," declared Mr. Hunt, emphasizing his willingness with a smile of triumph. Dibbs had fallen into the trap almost too easily. A few minutes later Mr. Hunt strode out of the

office and set off at a brisk pace for Paul Perkins's home. In his pocket he carried the message from Washington, and he intended it should not leave that receptacle till he was ready to destroy it. Mr. Hunt whistled cheerily as he walked down the street. His chest swelled with exultation till the buttons of his overcoat were seriously strained. He felt that he had accomplished a stroke of real business.

A sound of hammering from the wagon house as he reached the inventive scout's home apprised the astute plotter that the boy he was in search of was at work on the machine he desired so ardently to acquire. Without making his visit known to Mrs. Perkins, the father of Freeman Hunt softly walked over the withered turf to the wagon shed door, and the first thing Paul knew of his presence was when his dark shadow fell across the sheet of metal on which the lad was working.

Paul gave a little start as he looked up and saw who it was that had dropped in upon him so unexpectedly. The look of his face must have told

Hunt that he was not a welcome visitor, but this did not worry such a veteran of diplomacy as now faced the lad. Paul, however, had presence of mind enough to drop his hammer and come toward the door before the observant Mr. Hunt had done more than take in the outlines of the machine he was constructing.

"Ah, good morning, Paul," Hunt had said, as the boy looked up. "Have you time for a little chat."

"I guess so, Mr. Hunt," was the rejoinder. "Let us go in the house."

"I'd rather have it here. It is too early in the day to make a call, and your mother is probably busy."

Paul quite saw through this, and acted more decisively than he would have believed it possible for him to do. Coming forward, he laid his hand on the door, stepped through the opening, and an instant later he had closed the portal on the outside and slipped a big padlock into its hasp. If Hunt was annoyed, he did not show it.

"I don't blame you for not wishing me to see

the machine," he purred. "It is quite understandable; quite natural, after what occurred the other day. I deeply regret I lost my temper. It was the interest I felt in your welfare, though, that angered me when you refused my proposal."

"Hum," said Paul bluntly. "I thought you were mad with Rob Blake for butting in."

"I may have seemed so; I may have seemed so," said Mr. Hunt, with such regret in his tones that the soft-hearted Paul began to feel sorry for him. "I have a terrible temper, and when I saw that my good offer was likely to be rejected by you because of your willingness to listen to bad advice, I confess that my fury arose and mastered me. But, Paul, I am of a forgiving nature. I don't cherish any more anger against you. I came here this morning to repeat my offer, and——"

Mr. Hunt broke off and dived into his overcoat pocket. Apparently, he had just recollected the yellow envelope he now drew out.

"Why, Paul, my boy, I almost forgot! I've a

message here for you. Dibbs asked me to deliver it."

"Thank you," exclaimed the boy, taking the message. "Will you excuse me if I open it? It may be news from Washington."

"News you little expect," snarled Mr. Hunt to himself, his wolfish smile growing more pronounced. The envelope he had slipped to the lad contained the message he himself had scribbled after he had seen the real dispatch. Paul's face blanched as he read the brief, short message, which appeared to be genuine enough. At least, he, of course, had no grounds for doubting its authenticity.

"Can do nothing more in regard to ice motor," he read, with a sense of bitter shock. "Government declines to use it. Sorry, but negotiations are definitely closed. Merrill."

"Not bad news I hope?" inquired Mr. Hunt solicitously. Paul raised a troubled face. He was a lad utterly unused to guile or deception, and he therefore blurted out his trouble. He even read off the contents of the message, which

was hardly necessary, as Hunt himself had written it.

"Too bad; too bad," said Mr. Hunt, wagging his head slowly and assuming a sympathetic leer. "But, Paul, it's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. If the government doesn't know a good thing when it sees it, I do. My offer is still open. I'll go five hundred dollars higher, in fact. What do you say to fifteen hundred dollars for the rights to the machine?"

"I—I hardly know what to say," stuttered the confused lad. The sudden dashing of his hopes at Washington led him to be willing to accept almost anything. To people in the circumstances of the widow Perkins and her son, fifteen hundred dollars looked an immense sum.

Hunt noted the boy's hesitation, and he hastened to strike while the iron was hot. He produced a fountain pen and a check book, with a wizard-like flourish.

"Come," he said, persuasively, "say the word and I'll write you a check now. You give me a receipt saying that you accept the money in

consideration of all rights in the machine, and the thing is done."

"I suppose I'd better," hesitated Paul, miserably, "come inside, Mr. Hunt, and I'll fix up the paper you want."

"Good for you, Stonington, my boy!" chuckled the rascal to himself, as he turned to follow the boy into the house, "I guess this is where I get even on those brats who interfered the other day, and make a nice little sum besides."

But as they had their feet on the lower step leading to the side door there came a hail from the street.

"Paul—oh, Paul!"

It was Rob Blake's voice.

Hunt paled as he heard it, but recovered himself the next instant.

"Pshaw, he could never find it out," he muttered. "I wish he had kept away till I put the business through, though."

"Hul-lo, Rob, I'm glad to see you," cried Paul, "come on in. I want to ask your advice in something."

"Oh, I must protest against that," sputtered Mr. Hunt, "this is a confidential matter, my boy. You have pledged yourself to sell——"

"I beg your pardon, I don't think I have," rejoined Paul, "and what's more, I'm not going to sell till I ask Rob's advice. He knows a lot more about business than I do."

"Confound him, I think he does," grunted Hunt, but he added aloud as Rob came through the gate, "Quite right, Paul, quite right. But independence in business is the keynote of success. Ahem, Mr. Blake, you are looking well."

"I'm all right," rejoined Rob, bluntly, taking no pains to hide his dislike of Mr. Hunt; then, without paying further attention to the leering plotter, he turned to Paul.

"Get your telegram, Paul? I dropped in at the telegraph office on my way down and Blinky told me he had sent a message to you by Mr. Hunt."

"Yes, I got it," said Paul, bitterly, "and—and——"

"Not bad news, is it?"

"The worst. Washington won't touch the ice motor with a pair of tongs."

"Let's look," said Rob, extending his hand for the message which Paul had drawn from his pocket as he spoke. But before the inventive lad could pass the paper to his chum, Freeman Hunt's hand darted out and intercepted it.

"Let me look at it one moment," he said. "There's something that wasn't quite clear when I saw it before."

"But you didn't see it before," protested Paul. "You gave it to me and I told you what was in it. Then you made me your offer."

"I guess you had better give me that dispatch, Mr. Hunt," said Rob, quietly, but with an ominous glitter in his eyes.

"When I get ready, my young whipper-snapper," was the rejoinder, "and now if you will clear out for a minute, Paul and I have some business together."

"He wants to buy the rights to the machine for \$1,500," volunteered Paul.

"Oh, he does, does he?" snorted Rob. "Why,

I'd give you more than that myself. This fellow is after you to make money out of you, Paul, and——"

"How dare you, you cub," roared Stonington Hunt, once more losing his temper and springing forward, but something in Rob's steady gaze made him lower his uplifted arm.

"Are you going to let me see that message?" demanded Rob, in whose mind a suspicion had now grown into a definite certainty. "Are you?"

Hunt's answer was to tear the sheet of paper in two, but before he could reduce it to smaller bits and scatter them broadcast, Rob was upon him, and with one powerful wrench of the man's wrists had gained possession of it.

"I'll have you arrested for assault!" stormed Hunt. "I'll see the constable, I'll have you put in jail! I'll appear against you as a dangerous character, I'll——"

"Hold on a minute, there," warned Rob, who had fitted the two torn bits of crumpled paper together. "If you go to doing anything like that

I may have to turn the tables by appearing against you on a more serious charge."

Hunt paled, and his eyes glittered strangely, but he tried to bluff it out.

"What charge, boy?" he demanded, his words seeming to choke him.

"That of forgery," shot out Rob. "This message is a bit of rank deceit. It hasn't even got a time stamp or an office number on it. You'd better get out of here, Mr. Hunt, and—quick, too!"

Hunt made a step forward, and then appeared to change his mind. He turned so white with rage that his face seemed like a bit of carved marble.

"You young cur," he hissed. "This is the second time. You came near getting your deserts in the wood yesterday. Look out for the third time!"

Rob laughed as the fellow slunk off, but as Hunt strode up the street with as much bravado as he could assume the boy's face grew grave.

"Like father, like son, dad says sometimes," he

murmured. "I heard in the village that Freeman Hunt had been after rabbits yesterday. Now I know who owns the pointer. What a pair of rascals!"

Paul looked blank. He had scarcely understood the scene that had just transpired. Unacquainted with the routine of a telegraph office he had failed to detect that the required marks were lacking on Hunt's forged dispatch. He looked at Rob in a mystified way.

"What's it mean, Rob?" he asked, wonderingly. "Was Hunt trying to *bunco* me?"

"I guess that's the word, old fellow," said Rob, throwing his arm affectionately around the younger boy's neck, "but we checkmated him just in time."

CHAPTER XV.

A BOY WHO FLEW.

ONE of the features of winter life at Hampton was the annual bob-sled races down the steep, long hill outside the town, known as Jones's Hill. Other villages on Long Island, notably Huntington, had the same sort of carnivals, and they were always attended by people from a wide radius around. Neighboring villages sent teams and sleds to compete for prizes, and much merry sport resulted. For weeks beforehand the events were talked about, and sometimes—in the case of a spill—the contestants had reason to remember the day for weeks afterward. Although the "Bob Sled Carnival," as it was called, would not come off till three days after Christmas, the boys of Hampton were busy over their preparations for some time before.

"Going to enter a sled this year, Rob?" asked

Tubby, one afternoon in early December, as they were on their way home from the Academy.

"Of course," rejoined Rob, "there's that big ten-seater. We might enter her with an Eagle Patrol team, and race her against a Hawk sled."

"Bully," cried Merritt Crawford, "that would be a great scheme."

"The very thing," chimed in about a dozen lads, who were walking with our three boys.

"Why not send a challenge to the Aquebogue fellows?" piped up little Joe Digby; "they have a patrol over there now—The Wolves, they call themselves. Maybe they would enter a team against us."

"I guess they would," agreed Rob. "I'll write a challenge to-night. Let's see, Howard Major is their leader, isn't he?"

"That's right. He'll be sure to accept, too. Howard steered the Aquebogue bob-sled last year."

"Yes, when we let Aquebogue win the cup," laughed Rob, referring to a silver cup, the gift of the village boards of six villages, which was

annually contested for. "This year us fellows want to wake up and win it back."

"That's right."

"That's the stuff."

"We'll do it, too," several of the lads assured him, as the group came to a point where they separated and went their several ways. Paul Perkins had been an interested, if silent, participant in the plans, but when he found himself alone with his three friends he launched enthusiastically into a description of the kind of sled with which he was going to startle the community and their guests at the carnival. The lad had been spending odd hours over the construction of his winged glider, and he was pretty certain, he told them, that he had it perfected.

A visit to the Perkins's wagon-shed resulted in the exhibition of a business-like looking sled, with a wheel connected to the flexible steel runners with which to steer. From each side of the contrivance, a pair of canvas wings, spread over stout frames, extended for a distance of about ten

feet. The frame was made as light as possible, and Paul was confident the glider would work.

"Tell you what we'll do," said Tubby, as they stood regarding the odd looking contrivance, "there's a good full moon to-night. We'll slip out of the village after supper and try it out on Jones's Hill."

It was agreed that this would furnish some amusement and excitement. Soon the boys were enthusiastically making their arrangements. Paul said that he could detach the wings and so carry the sled without exciting undue attention.

"You see, I don't know if it will work yet," the young inventor confessed, "and I don't want to be the laughing stock of the place in case a crowd is on hand to see me take a tumble."

"No danger of that," Merritt assured him. "We'll sneak round by the back way up through Cryders Lane and then take that path through the scrub oak to the top of the hill."

Like so many conspirators the lads met at Paul Perkins's after the evening meal, and each bear-

ing a portion of the load, they set out for the long, steep grade down which the test was to be made.

"I heard in the village to-night that Freeman Hunt and his crowd have a big bob they are going to enter for the cup race," said Tubby, as they walked along.

"Too bad there is no way of keeping them out. They'll be sure to be up to something crooked," commented Merritt. "However, as it's free for all, I suppose we can't do anything."

"Not a thing," rejoined Rob. "By the way, Paul, did you hear anything further from the lawyer in Washington, since you received his dispatch telling you that Hunt's message was, just as I supposed, a forgery?"

"Only that the outlook is very favorable," was Paul's response. "He says—it sounds like a fairy tale," he interjected with a note of apology—"he said that if the government took it they would give five thousand dollars for the exclusive right to use the machine."

"Bully!" cried Rob. "I guess that would set

our friend Hunt back a peg or two if he heard of it."

They met no one on their way to the hill, as the night was chilly and they stuck to their little-frequented route. The moonlight lit up the steep descent and made it as bright as day almost, throwing here and there sharp, black shadows on the white snow. It was an ideal night for sledging and the boys felt their pulses beat with excitement as they adjusted the wings and prepared the glider, of which so much was expected, for its initial flight.

At last the wings were firmly bolted on, and fixed in position with set screws. In addition, piano wires leading to eyelets in the frame of the sled, and which acted as wing-braces, were utilized. When this was complete, each wing was as rigid as steel, presenting a slightly curved surface toward the front. They were, in fact, closely modeled on the wings Paul's observant eyes had noted on the army airship.

"Now, then, who is to have the honor of the first flight on the greatest invention of the age?"

Rob laughed as he gazed about him.

"Don't all speak at once," said Merritt.

"Any one can have my turn," ejaculated Tubby, with deep conviction.

"Why, I'm to be the first to try it, of course," spoke up Paul, boldly. "I'm lightest, and anyhow, an inventor ought not to risk anybody's bones but his own on his freak ideas."

"Suppose we take it half way down the hill for a starter," suggested Rob, "then we can see if it's going to work or tip over, without running such a risk of a smash-up."

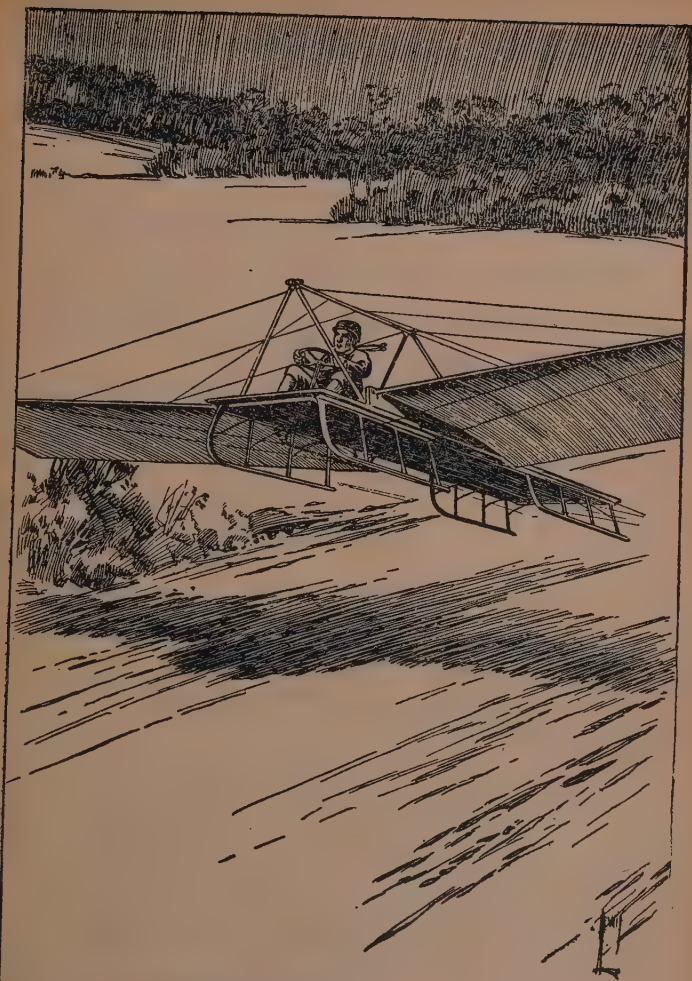
Accordingly, the contrivance, looking like a queer bird in the moonlight, was shoved down the hill to a post about a quarter of a mile from the bottom.

Paul seated his slight frame upon the craft, bracing his feet against two projecting iron rests and taking a firm grip of the steering wheel.

"All right?" asked Rob, as the others stood behind, holding detaining hands upon the vehicle.

"Let her go," ordered Paul, boldly.

Like a stone from a sling, the sled shot off into



Up and up the strange bird-like craft climbed, till it was about ten feet above the ground.

the cold, breathless night. On and on under the stars it flew, its runners grating with a sharp, musical note on the close-packed snow, for that afternoon there had been a lot of sleighing on the grade.

"She won't rise!" exclaimed Tubby. "She's like me. Built for a career close to the ground."

"Hold on. I'm not so sure about that," exclaimed Rob the next instant. "Look!"

As he spoke a strange thing happened. The sled seemed to rise from the earth as if drawn upward by some invisible force. Even at that distance they could see Paul's body shift as he strove to maintain his balance on the contrivance.

Up and up the strange bird-like craft climbed, till it was about ten feet above the ground. It skimmed along for a hundred feet or so and then came down to earth again with a bump that unseated the inexperienced rider and sent him tumbling head first into a snow bank. But, as the others came running down the hill, Paul extricated himself and gave a shrill cheer.

"Hooray, fellows! She works!" he cried. "It's a success."

"It's a success as a dumping machine, I'll admit," sniffed Tubby.

"Just wait till I put some springs on to take up the jolt when she lands and she'll settle like a bit of thistledown," Paul assured him.

"If she doesn't settle you first," put in Merritt, rather doubtfully.

"Anybody want a ride?" asked Paul, as he prepared to tow the craft back to the top of the hill again.

"No, I haven't made my will yet and I can't afford to risk the legal complications which might ensue in case of my death," responded Tubby, grandiloquently.

"I haven't decided what sort of stuff I'll have them write on my tombstone," chimed in Merritt, "so you can count me out."

"You're in a blue funk. That's what's the matter," laughed Rob. "If you want to take a chance on having your machine smashed up I'll take her down, Paul," he went on.

"Hooray for the hero," scoffed Tubby.

"Adios," said Merritt, placing his hand over his heart in an affected attitude, and using some of the Spanish he had picked up in the West, "we'll gather up the remains to-morrow—mañana."

"Banana, you mean," chuckled Paul, "and it'll just be as easy as eating one for Rob to ride the Pegasus."

"Oh, you've christened it already, have you?" inquired Rob.

"That's the only name I could think of," answered Paul. "Pegasus was a winged horse, you know."

"And poets have been riding the poor critter to death ever since," chimed in Tubby, with a snicker.

Rob decided that he would try his experimental ride from the summit of the hill. From what he had seen, it would be no very difficult task to control the winged sled. He was, in fact, so anxious to be off on his initial voyage that he could hardly

wait till they reached the summit of the moonlit hill.

At last, however, everything was ready for the start.

"Whoa, Peggy!" cautioned Tubby, as with Merritt he hung on to the rear of the sled, while Paul gave Rob some final instructions.

"Balance her just like you would a bicycle," he said, "and when you feel her rising don't resist, but just take it easy. Look out for the landing, though. It'll jolt the wishbone out of you."

"I expect to get a tumble," Rob assured him.

"Guess I'm all right," he added the next minute, straining his eyes to make sure the hill ahead was clear.

Suddenly he was off, rushing through the frosty air at an exhilarating clip. All at once he felt a queer, rising movement, and knew that the winged sled was starting to spread its pinions. Far behind him he heard a faint cheer. Like a bicycle rider, Rob balanced a tipping tendency in either direction by swaying his body.

"Whee-e-e-e-e-e!" he yelled in sheer delight

at the wonderful sensation as he clove the atmosphere. Above him the frosty stars twinkled. Beneath was the long, white hill, chequered vividly here and there with inky splashings of shadow.

Suddenly, just ahead as it seemed, and slightly below him, there came a loud shout. Rob was startled, and for an instant he allowed his attention to waver. Like a flash the machine tilted, and with the boy still clinging desperately to its careening form, the Pegasus shot staggeringly downward through the air, driving straight at four dark forms that had just come into view at the foot of the hill.

"Look out!" was all Rob had time to yell before the marvelous flying sled was ploughing at top speed into their midst.

CHAPTER XVI.

"THERE'S MANY A SLIP——"

"Wow! Look out where you're coming!"

"What is it?"

"It's a giant owl!"

These and a dozen other exclamations of dismay and alarm mingled with a great splintering, and crashing, and snapping, as Rob came ploughing down to earth. Luckily, he fetched up in a snow bank, into which the velocity with which the winged-sled had been traveling, drove it, for three feet or more.

The wings were reduced to a mass of torn canvas and shattered frames, while the steel-runners were buckled and bent under the strain. A more complete wreck was never seen.

But havoc had been done, likewise, to the group into which Rob had inadvertently plunged. As it so happened, they were the last persons in the world he would have wished to encounter just

then, for in the voices that rang out about him, as the four figures were thrown right and left, he had recognized the familiar tones of Freeman Hunt, Bill Bender, Jack Curtiss and Lem Lonsdale. They had, by a strange coincidence, selected the same night upon which Paul's friends had come to try out their big sleigh with which they intended to capture the silver cup.

"Anybody hurt?" hailed Rob, as he extricated himself from the snow-pile, feeling a little dizzy by the rapidity with which his smash-up had occurred. At one moment he was flying, and the next he was ignominiously toppled into a snow bank, with the splintered wreck of his winged vehicle about him.

"Anybody hurt?" he repeated, coming toward the group, the members of which were brushing off the snow that had clung to them when they were shot here and there by the lad's sudden descent.

"It's that cub Blake," whispered Hunt to Jack Curtiss.

"Well, what of it?" growled Jack in a low

voice. "We aren't scared of him or a dozen like him. Hurt?" he went on at the top of his voice. "No, we ain't, but I suppose you'd like to have seen us all injured for life by that fool thing you were flopping about on. You're a great inventor—not."

"It isn't my invention," said Rob, with meaning emphasis. "It was the idea of a friend of mine—a young fellow who made something else that interested a certain man in this town so much that he tried to forge a telegram to get a chance to buy it."

"Are you aiming at me?" demanded Freeman Hunt, coming forward, "or at my father?"

"If the cap fits, you can wear it," retorted Rob, thoroughly angry with Hunt and his companions. He was turning contemptuously away when Jack Curtiss stepped forward.

"Hold on there a minute, young fellow," he snarled, "you've got a lesson coming to you, and right here is as good a place as any to give it to you."

"The same sort of lesson you tried to give me

in the road one night, eh?" flung back Rob, scornfully; "the same sort of lesson that the fellow who fired that gun at me in the wood wanted to give me, I guess."

"It was an accident. I didn't mean to hurt you," blurted out Freeman Hunt, before his wiser cronies could stop him.

"Then my guess was right. It was you that fired it," said Rob. "Thanks for giving me the proof of it."

"Bother it all, he's got a hold over us now," muttered Jack Curtiss, turning away as Rob's chums came up.

"Well, the smash-up happened," said Rob to Paul. "I'm awfully sorry, Paul. I couldn't help it, though. Something seemed to divert my attention for a second, and the next thing I knew I was head-over-heels in the snow-pile."

"Good thing it was there," said Merritt, who, with the others, had been examining the wreck.

"See what a big hole his head made," cried Tubby, pointing to the hole in the soft snow where Rob had driven into it.

"I'll make it all right with you, Paul," Rob promised. "I'll see that you are able to build a bigger, better flyer than this one. I believe that if we don't break our necks trying it out, that you have a good idea there."

"Do you really think so?" asked Paul.

"I do," rejoined Rob.

"He really does," sneered Jack Curtiss from the patch of shadow in which he and his cronies were standing.

"I wish you'd broken your skull instead of hitting that snow bank," he went on.

"I don't doubt it," said Rob, serenely; "unfortunately for you, I didn't."

"I guess you think you are going to get that cup at the sled carnival, don't you," chuckled Bill Bender; "well, you haven't got a chance."

"No, you won't know you're on earth," chimed in Lem Lonsdale, viciously.

"Oh, come on, fellows," urged Freeman Hunt, who had his own reasons for not wishing to linger, "leave the babies alone. They've smashed their pretty toy, now let them run home to bed."

So saying, he turned, and began lugging the long, racy-looking toboggan they had brought with them up the steep, white hill. With a muttered threat about punching heads and "fresh young cubs," Jack Curtiss and the others followed him.

"Well, I guess we'd better pick up the remains and go home," said Tubby, dragging out a splintered wing-tip from the snow.

"Hold on a minute," said Rob, "let's wait here and see what those fellows can do. I guess they've come out here to try that big, new sled."

Sure enough, a few seconds later there came a loud screech from the top of the hill.

"Here they come," volunteered Tubby, bending forward.

High up the hill, outlined sharply against the snow, there came rushing toward them a flying object. It seemed to fairly whiz over the frozen surface. Hardly had they sighted it before it flashed past with yells of defiance from its occupants, and vanished into the darkness cast by a clump of big fir trees.

"Well!" exclaimed Rob, "they've got a flyer; no mistake about that."

"It'll be faster yet when they get those runners rubbed down," vouchsafed Merritt; "it only came in this afternoon from New York. They got it from a big sporting-goods house."

"Maybe the same one Jack got his flying machine from," chuckled Paul, smiling over the remembrance of the bully's discomfiture on the occasion of the aeroplane model contest, as told in the first volume of this series.

"Shouldn't wonder," responded Tubby, in reply to Paul's observation.

"Where did they get the money from?" wondered Merritt. "That sled must have cost a lot."

"Oh, Hunt's father gives him plenty of money," was Rob's response, "and the others are not exactly poor. They could easily afford such a sled for the gratification of winning the cup away from us."

"I guess that's about all they've gone into the competition for," suggested Paul.

The others agreed with him. It would be a

big feather in the caps of the arch enemies of the Boy Scouts if they could capture any of the events which were to take place on the hill after Christmas, especially the big cup event.

"It's up to us to look out for any crooked work, then," said Tubby, as, with arms full of such parts of the shattered Pegasus as seemed worth keeping, they started for home. "Those fellows won't stick at anything as we know."

"Oh, don't be too hard on them," was Rob's comment; "there's good in most chaps if you look for it."

"Hum," sniffed Merritt, "you'd have to go prospecting with a pickaxe and dynamite to find it in Jack Curtiss' crowd."

"And then use a microscope," commented Tubby, in spite of Rob's protests that they ought to use "fair play."

As Rob had prophesied, Paul managed to build a new winged-sled, and despite an occasional "flop," it proved to be a handy sort of contrivance, making short glides and alighting on its spring runners without more than almost dis-

locating the rider's vertebræ. However, boy-like, the lads of Hampton regarded it as a wonderful invention, and lauded it to the skies, so much so, that a paragraph concerning "our ingenious young fellow townsman, Paul Perkins," was inserted in an issue of the *Hampton Local*.

"Wouldn't that make you sick," sneered Jack Curtiss, when he saw the item. "Ingenious indeed—anybody could do things like that if they had a mind to."

In this saying, Jack came as near to the truth as in anything he had uttered for a long time.

Jones's Hill became alive now in the gloaming, and on moonlight nights, with sleds of all descriptions, from small, old-fashioned "foot-steerers" to the big, polished, nickel-trimmed, flexible-guiding store varieties. One thing the trials had shown, on comparison with previous records, and this was that the capture of the silver cup probably lay between the big toboggan of the Curtiss faction, and the six-seater manipulated by Rob and his chums.

"If there is no dark horse entered, Hampton

gets the cup this year sure," Rob declared one evening as the happy, tired boys began to retrace their steps to the village, after an evening of exciting practice.

"I don't see much satisfaction in that if Curtiss and his crowd win it," mumbled Tubby, which brought down upon his head another lecture from Rob, who, as should all good scouts, did not believe in harboring a grudge.

"Let the best team win," he said; "that's all we ask for—that, and fair play."

On the evening of which we have spoken, Paul and his chums met at his house to discuss final plans for the race and talk over the advisability of showing off the paces of the winged-sled. In the midst of their talk, Rob got up from the table and started for the door with a plate containing sundry apple cores, the remains of the fruit which the deliberators had consumed as an aid to their counsels.

He had opened the portal and was about to chuck them out into the night when he suddenly paused and stood listening sharply. He thought

—was sure, in fact—that he had heard a furtive footstep creep away from the house as he flung the door open.

“Shut that door for goodness sake,” howled Tubby, as Rob stood there peering out; “you’re freezing us to death in here.”

The others added their voices of protest. Thus admonished, Rob closed the door, and returned to the table. Although he said nothing about it, he could not get out of his head the idea that he had seen a form, darker than the surrounding blackness, slip away from the house as he gazed forth.

It was not far from midnight when the boyish conference broke up, and Rob, Tubby and Merritt started for their homes, which lay in the same direction. They had reached Tubby’s house and were just saying good-night when there came a sudden alarming shout. On the frosty air it rang out, as clearly and as startlingly as a midnight bell.

“Fire! Fire! Fire!”

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRE!

"THERE it is, down there!" exclaimed Tubby, pointing back toward the part of the village they had just left.

A red, flickering glare was already illuminating the sky in that part of the place. Clearly it was the fire. As they gazed, other shouts were added to the first outcry.

"Come on!" shouted Rob, starting off at top speed in that direction. But as he set off another idea occurred to him. The firehouse was not far from Tubby's house—on the next block, in fact.

"You fellows go ahead!" shouted Rob, turning. He dashed off toward the firehouse in which the old-fashioned hand pump engine was kept. On top of the place was a big bell, the rope of which hung down in front of the building. Rob seized

it as he arrived at the place, and started a wild clamor ringing out.

"That will rouse out the Boy Scouts," he muttered; "they all know what to do when they hear the fire bell."

The boy was right. Hardly had the echoes of the tocsin died out before from dozens of houses boyish figures came pouring. Boy Scouts every one of them, and ready for active duty. Little Andy, the Eagles' bugler, went tearing past as Rob dropped the bell rope, satisfied that the alarm had been well-sounded. He was racing on when Rob seized him by the shoulder.

"Sound the assembly!" he ordered.

Andy, considerably startled at first, quickly recovered himself, and placed the bugle to his lips. The sibilant call was soon sounding. In less than five minutes the Boy Scouts had obediently gathered at the firehouse, and, under Rob's directions, were falling in to await orders. Dale Harding was there, too, with the Hawks, and the two patrols eagerly hung on the next word of command.

Down the street came Boffy Groggs, the janitor of the firehouse. He was half asleep and was regarding the key he carried in his hand as if he hardly knew what to do with it. The volunteer firemen of the village had not yet put in an appearance.

"Putting on their fancy uniforms," guessed Rob, as Boffy came mooning along.

"Hey, Boffy, give me that!" shouted Rob, as he saw the key in the sleepy old man's hand.

"Fire in your hat?" inquired old Boffy, who was somewhat deaf.

"No, give me that!" snapped Rob. "Quick, there's no time to lose!"

"I haven't got on my shoes, and that's a fact," grunted Boffy, comprehendingly. "I'll go back and put them on."

He was actually starting back when Rob seized the key from his hand.

"Hey! Hey!" shouted Boffy, indignant at being robbed of his authority, as he deemed it, "give that back, Rob Blake, you've got no right
——"

"To be wasting time here," exclaimed Rob, impatiently, and hastily opening the firehouse door; "that's true enough, Boffy—Hullo, Tubby, where is the fire?"

"It's—it's at Paul Perkins's," exclaimed the fat boy, who had just come racing up; "the wagon house—poof—it——"

He stopped, all out of breath, and gasped like a newly-landed fish.

"Out with the engine, boys, and race her down to Paul Perkins's place!" ordered Rob, not waiting to hear the rest.

With a shout the Boy Scouts swept into the engine house, and soon were tailing onto the long ropes by which the engine was dragged.

"Forward! Double quick!" came the next order.

"Here! Here!" shouted Boffy.

"We're going to the fire. Out of the way, Boffy!" yelled the boys.

"It's not for hire! Bring it back!" shouted the hard-of-hearing janitor.

"Forward!" roared Rob and Dale Harding in a breath.

Instantly the wheels began to revolve, and the ponderous machine came trundling out of the shed, and an instant later was being raced down the street, drawn by strong, young arms. Cheering like soldiers, the Boy Scouts dashed along. Old Boffy sprang back as the big machine crashed past him.

"Come back! Come back!" he yelled, as it vanished in the distance.

As Tubby had reported, it was the wagon house which was on fire. As the Boy Scouts came racing up with the engine, yellow flames were licking hungrily at its eastern end. A red glow spread all about, and the air was filled with the sharp, acrid smell of blazing wood.

"Here you, and you, and you," ordered Rob, singling out three lads, "take that hose down to the brook. The rest of you tail on to the hand-brakes."

In an instant the lads ordered to carry the hose to the creek were off, and it was not more than

five minutes before the pumps began to suck. Presently, from the clanking apparatus, there began to pour a feeble stream. It strengthened as the engine got limbered up and soon quite a force of water was spurting upon the flames. They hissed and set up clouds of steam as the cold water struck them.

"Hooray!" shouted the boys at the brakes, but their leaders quickly silenced them.

"Save your wind to work the pumps," ordered Dale Harding.

"The machine! The machine!" cried a voice, and Paul Perkins, pale and blackened with soot and flying embers, came dashing in among them. The lad's hands were cut and bleeding.

"I tried to drag it out by myself, but I couldn't," he explained to Rob.

"Great Scott, I forgot all about that," exclaimed Rob. "Come on, fellows, let's get Paul's machine out of there. I guess we can save it yet."

It looked doubtful, however, if this could be accomplished. The flames now were leaping sav-

agely up, but as yet they were confined to one end of the building. The wind, though, was driving them angrily forward, devouring the old dried timbers with the greed of a ferocious monster.

"Open those doors!" shouted Rob, and the next instant the big wooden bar had fallen from the portals as Paul unlocked the stout padlock holding them. As they swung open, the boys could see the machine standing in the centre of the place, illumined with a red glare. The heat that drove out was as intense as if they had opened the doors of a bake oven, but they didn't flinch. Led by Rob and Dale Harding, they plunged into the fiery place. The heat seemed as if it would split their skins and singe their hair, but they paid little attention to it in the excitement of the moment.

"Lay hold of those runners, boys," cried Dale, "we'll drag her out that way."

"Good scheme," panted Rob, bending over and seizing hold. But the machine was heavy and refused to budge.

"We need a rope," suggested Merritt.

"No time to get it," panted Rob; "come on, try again."

They strained till their muscles cracked, and this time the bulky contrivance slipped forward a little. Working with might and main, they had almost succeeded in getting it to a place of safety when there was a sudden shout from Paul.

"The gasoline. That tank's full of it."

"Great Scott, it will blow up!" cried Dale Harding.

As he spoke a cloud of sparks and hissing embers flew about them, driven from the burning end of the barn by a puff of wind.

"Don't quit!" urged Rob, as they hesitated; "no Boy Scout ever quits. We've tackled this job; let's see it through."

His words put heart into the somewhat scared boys, and once more they bent their efforts to dragging out the machine. This time they managed to run it fairly beyond the danger line, and it was as well that they did so at that moment, for the feeble stream thrown by the hand-engine had had little effect on the flames, and by now

one entire end of the wagon house had been burned away.

By this time, also, a big crowd had gathered, and as Rob and his companions, scorched and singed, stood triumphantly by the side of the machine they had rescued, they could hear angry shouts and the sounds of an argument coming from the direction of the engine. Elbowing their way through the throng, many members of which sought to detain and congratulate them, the lads found that the regular firemen had arrived and were attempting to wrest the handbrakes from the Boy Scouts.

The boys were, somewhat naturally, protesting. Just as Rob and his friends came up, one big, hulking fellow laid hands on little Joe Digby and was about to hurl him backward out of the crowd.

"You young monkey!" he exclaimed; "you kids had no business to steal our engine!"

"Good thing they did," howled the crowd. "If they hadn't the whole village might have been

burned by the time you fellows got on your uniforms."

"You're all right at a firemen's picnic, but no good at a fire," shouted someone.

"'Ray for the Boy Scouts," came another cry.

"Shut up!" roared the exasperated firemen, reddening under their shiny helmets, all glistening with paint and decorations.

"Here, this has got to stop," said Rob, stepping forward. "Scouts, let go of the engine. We've done our part of the work; now let them get busy."

"That's right, Rob," came his father's voice out of the crowd; "while they were arguing the fire was burning. Work those pumps, boys."

"'Ray!" yelled the crowd again, as the firemen began to pump strenuously.

The machine clanked and rattled like a thresh-er, and a great stream of water poured forth, but, unfortunately it had no effect upon the blaze.

"The house! The house!" came a sudden cry in a woman's voice. "Sparks are falling on the roof. It'll be on fire in a minute."

It was Mrs. Perkins. With her hair in curl papers and a wonderful flannel nightgown on, she stood in the back door of her home and yelled this warning. At any other time the boys might have felt inclined to laugh. The situation now was too serious for that, however. As she spoke, a perfect hail of sparks were being driven upon the shingled roof. It was dry and old, and was already beginning to smolder.

"Get that ladder," shouted Merritt, whose sharp eyes had spied one leaning against an old tree some distance from the house. In an instant a dozen pairs of Boy Scout hands had carried it to the scene.

"Run her up, boys, and get all the buckets you can," ordered Rob, as the ladder was placed in position.

Calling Dale Harding, Merritt and Tubby, the boy sprang up toward the roof. Behind him, upon the ladder, stood the others. They had guessed his purpose—to form a bucket line from the pump to the roof. With Hiram at the pump handle, and plenty of willing volunteers to relieve

him when he tired, buckets and tin pails of water were soon passing rapidly along the line and being splashed over the roof. As fast as Rob got one section wetted, he passed on to another, till the whole covering of the house was drenched, and there was no danger of the place catching.

By this time, the wonderful motor-scooter had, too, been dragged beyond the reach of the flames, and although the wagon house was speedily reduced to a heap of glowing embers, the invention, for which Freeman Hunt and his father had striven so desperately, was safe. As the crowd saw that the excitement was over, it began to break up and melt away, till only a few persons were left about the ruins.

Among these lingerers were Stonington Hunt and his worthy son. The elder of the two seemed to be in a great rage. He gritted his teeth as he gazed at the Boy Scouts clustering about Paul's machine, and spoke to his offspring in a low voice.

"Luck seems to have turned against me of late," he muttered, savagely; "another failure.

But either I'll have that machine or no one else shall, or my name's not Stonington Hunt."

"We started the fire at the wrong end of the wagon house, pop," rejoined his son, in a low voice, but low as his tones were, his father seemed seized with alarm.

"Not a word, Freeman," he muttered hoarsely, looking about him in a scared sort of way. "Remember we know nothing about the fire. We were in bed when it started, and raced down here to find out what terrible calamity threatened our fair village."

Freeman Hunt nodded comprehendingly.

"All right, pop; mum's the word," he breathed, "but we'll try again."

"Those brats are not through with me yet by a good sight," rejoined his father, vindictively, by way of reply.

"Nor with me," chimed in Freeman.

Soon after this worthy pair left the place, having been unnoticed by Rob or any of his chums or scouts. It was Tubby who, poking about the ruins after his usual inquisitive fashion,

made a sudden discovery, a short time later. He had come across a piece of wood which was unburned, having been thrown aside by Paul Perkins in his first efforts to quell the fire.

The boy sniffed this bit of wood curiously and then summoned his friends.

"Smell that," he demanded of them in turn.

Each lad took a sniff of the proffered bit of wood and passed it on to the next in silence.

"Well?" interrogated Tubby, after it passed a dozen hands, "what is it?"

"Kerosene," was the unanimous answer.

"That's right," rejoined Rob; "fellows, it's up to the Boy Scouts to find out who set fire to Paul Perkins's wagon house, and tried to destroy his machine."

"Maybe this will help us do it," suggested Tubby, meditatively. As he spoke he extended the oil-soaked fragment into the glare of a lantern hanging from the fire engine. On it they could then see distinctly was the impress of a man's thumb.

"I've heard of robbers and bad men being de-

tected through just such imprints," declared Rob; "may be it will work in this case. They say no two men's thumb prints are alike."

"If that's so, we'd better start out making a collection," suggested Tubby, "and I've got an idea that there is one man in this town whose imprint would be of interest in that connection."

"Who?" queried a dozen eager Boy Scout voices.

"The man in the moon," laughed the fat youth, pocketing the fragment of wood. But it was to be a long time before he had an opportunity to use it to confirm his suspicions.

CHAPTER XVIII.

JACK USES A FILE.

"Oh, the sea wot flows;
And the ship wot goes,
And the lad wot fears no dan-ger;
And the pleasant gale,
And the swelling sail,
And the lass wot loves a sail-or-r-r-!"

"AHoy there, lad!" exclaimed the singer, bluff old Captain Hudgins, "bringing up all standing," as he would have expressed it, in front of Rob Blake's home on the morning of the Bob-sled Carnival.

"What time are them sliding craft due to slip their moorings on Jones's Hill?"

"Why, hullo, cap.," exclaimed Rob, hastening down the snowy path to meet his old friend from Topsail Island. "I thought I knew that song. The races start this afternoon, but owing to the

number of entries the committee has decided to continue them to-night."

"Ter-night!" exclaimed the ancient mariner, "you're a-goin' ter come sky-hootin' down that hill in the black night, boy? Stand by."

"Not in the black night, exactly," laughed Rob, amused at the old man's bewilderment; "you see, this was decided on some days ago, and they've got incandescents rigged up on both sides of the course. It's going to be a pretty sight, and there'll be a big crowd out to see it."

"Reckon I'll have to stay over then," snorted the captain. "When I was a boy we thought bob-sledding was good enough, without havin' races atween port and starboard craft, with patent steerers, and more opportunities to break your neck than you can shake a stick at."

"Oh, it's not as bad as that," Rob assured him. "It's safe enough if the fellows are careful, and they all are, and besides that, they all know how to handle a big sled, and that's a whole lot."

"Reckon so," agreed the captain. "Wal, I've

got to trim my sails and get afore the wind. I'm setting my course for the post office."

"I'm going that way, too," said Rob; "I'll walk with you."

Together they set off up the street, which was filled with men and boys, all discussing the forthcoming bob-sled races. The regular population of Hampton was already augmented by rooters from other towns, and the afternoon trains would bring in more. In front of the post office Rob met Tubby Hopkins, Merritt Crawford, Paul Perkins and Hiram Nelson. They were to form the team of the "Eagle," as the Boy Scout's sled had been named.

Several other boys had their tobogganing sleds in front of the post office, which appeared to be quite a gathering place for the prospective contestants. Among them were Jack Curtiss and his team. The former bully of the Hampton Academy sneered as the boys came up, but made no other sign of hostility.

The "Eagle" was painted a bright red with gilt trimmings, and looked very handsome. Several

in the crowd were making admiring comments on her as Rob approached. Jack Curtiss' sled, too, came in for a lot of attention. It fairly glistened with paint and varnish, and being a store-made affair was naturally better finished off than the Boy Scouts' craft.

"Curtiss and his bunch will win the cup, hands down," a man was saying, as the Boy Scouts moved off on their way to the hill, where already several boys were practicing.

"Not much doubt of it," was the response; "they've sure got a fine sled there."

"Say, young feller, want to bet on yer team?" cried the first speaker after Rob.

"I don't bet, thank you," was the response; "but we've got as good a chance of winning as the next fellow."

"Well, wouldn't that jar you?" muttered the man, as the crowd broke into a laugh at Rob's retort.

"You want to bet all your money on us," said Freeman Hunt, and he and his cronies prepared to follow Rob and his chums.

"How's that?" asked the man.

"Because we're going to win. There's no doubt of it," was the rejoinder.

"Well, you seem mighty positive about it," commented the man.

Workmen were busy on either side of the hill stringing up electric lights, as the boys arrived. Between the rows of tall poles crowds of lads were scooting down the hill on their sleds, or laboriously hauling them up again. It was an animated scene, and there were plenty of lookers-on as the racing sleds glided swiftly over the smooth surface. It had been watered and packed till it was as hard and smooth as a sheet of glass. It glistened in the winter sun like polished steel.

"Wow! Won't we whiz over that!" exclaimed Merritt, as they hastened to ascend the hill by a path left at one side of the course. Arrived at the top, an examination of the runners of the sled followed. They were found to be as smooth as a mirror, which is an important thing, for the slightest roughness will check a sled's speed more than would be thought possible.

"That's one reason I think we may have a chance over Curtiss and his bunch," explained Rob, as they took their seats for a trial trip.

"How's that?" inquired Tubby, who, on account of his weight, sat in the middle.

"Why, their runners have hardly had time to wear smooth yet," went on Rob. "You know it takes a long time to get them into good shape. We wore ours down last year, before we lightened the sled and widened it."

"Ready!" shouted Merritt, from his seat in front.

"Right!" came the reply.

The next instant they were off. How that sled flew down the smooth hill! The frosty air whipped tinglingly back against their happy faces. The runners screamed as they rushed over the hard snow. Small boys cheered as they shot by. Everybody knew that the "Eagle" was one of the favorites in the big event—the race for the silver cup.

"She's fast," grudgingly admitted Jack Cur-

tiss, as the red sled flew by him on its way down the hill.

"But we can clip a nailparing of a second off her," rejoined Freeman Hunt, boastfully.

"Think so?" inquired Lem Lonsdale.

"Oh, sure," chimed in Bill Bender, confidently.

Both Bill and Jack had been betting pretty freely on their success, and both felt certain that they would win. But a momentary look of anxiety had crossed their faces as Rob and his chums flew by. There was no denying that their pace was tremendous. The Aquebogue team, which had arrived on an early train, followed the "Eagle" down the hill, but did not seem to make such good time. Still, it was possible that, as defenders of the cup, they were not showing all they could do.

"We can beat them with a ton of hay tied on behind," sneered Jack Curtiss, as he watched the Aquebogue Wolves make their practice trips. His words seemed justified by the speed their own sled made. Like a varnished streak, she shot down the hill again and again, each time wear-

ing her runners smoother and making better time.

And so the morning wore away. The afternoon was devoted to the small races, Ernest Thompson and Joe Digby, of the Eagles, winning two prizes to their great delight. Some of the Hawk boys, too, captured events. But the feature of the afternoon was Paul Perkins's winged sled, which cavorted and flopped about to the huge delight of the crowd, and to the terror of the lad's mother, who was among the onlookers. At four o'clock the minor events were all over and there only remained the silver cup to be contested for.

The Aquebogue Wolves, all strapping youths, considerably older than the Hampton boys, strode about the town confidently during the evening, although the talk of the Hamptonites must have disturbed them a little. The teams from the other contesting towns also talked big, but that seemed to be more to keep up appearances than anything else.

"Gee, the time seems as if it would never

pass," said Tubby, as after supper the lads hastened back to the hill. The electric lights were glowing now, casting a yellow radiance over the snow. Few people were on hand as yet, however, as the race was not to start till eight o'clock.

The few that were on hand were warmly muffled up in furs and heavy overcoats. Of course, there were plenty of small boys about, playing all manner of tricks on one another to keep warm, and hurling snowballs at persons they deemed good-natured enough not to resent it—and at others, too. What boy doesn't enjoy "a chase"?

The sleds which were to take part in the race were lined up in readiness near the starting point. While the crews had been at supper various persons had been left in charge of the sleds. Rob and his chums had found a youth, who was quite a character in the village, to take care of theirs. This lad's name was Sim Bimm.

Whether it was caused by his name—which rhymed, or by natural gift that way, nobody knew, but Sim Bimm had difficulty in saying anything in prose. On the contrary, rhyming

marked his conversation. He was reputed to be half-witted, but in some things he was shrewd enough. For lack of a better guardian the boys had singled Sim Bimm out.

"Now, Sim," Rob had said impressively, "there's a dollar coming to you if you watch our sled carefully. Don't let anyone come near it or touch it in any way. Do you understand?"

"Right and true, I'll watch for you," responded Sim, giving vent to his peculiar mode of expression.

"No matter what excuse they give don't let them lay hands on the sled, Sim," added Merritt.

"Not a foot nor a hand, be they ever so grand," Sim assured the boys, proudly.

"All right, Sim," said Tubby, as they moved off; "we trust you, remember."

"You're right Sim to trust; I'll watch till I bust," rejoined the rhyming youth.

Hardly had the lads vanished down the hill, however, before Sim, who in order to watch more closely, was seated right upon the sleigh, saw two figures approaching him.

"Here comes William Bender, and Jack Curtiss so slender," improvised Sim as they drew closer.

"Hello, Sim," exclaimed Jack, with great appearance of cordiality, "what are you doing?"

"Watching this sled, with heart and head," was the response.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed Jack, "at your rhyming again, eh, Sam? Want to earn a little money?"

"Don't care for money; now isn't that funny?" firmly replied Sim, taking a grip on the sled with both hands.

"But you like candy, don't you?" asked Jack.

"Gee! Mo-lasses candy; wish I had some handy," wavered Sim, his mouth beginning to water.

"Well, if you'll go a little errand for me I'll give you fifty cents to buy some with," Jack promised, taking out a fifty-cent piece and extending it temptingly. "We'll watch the sled while you're gone."

"I oughtn't to go; that's one thing I know," said Sim; but there was a sort of undecided quaver in his voice.

"You've got him," whispered Bill. Jack nodded.

"It isn't very far," the enemy of the Boy Scouts went on. "It's just to get my gloves. I dropped them at the foot of the hill. You can be there and back in ten minutes."

"I'll go like the wind, be back quickly, you'll find," promised Sim, rising to his feet. The thought of molasses candy had proven too much for him.

"Very well, then; be off. We'll wait for you here to take care of the sled."

"With a dollar and a half, I'll sing and I'll laugh," chuckled Sim to himself as he dashed off, going as fast as his long legs would carry him.

"Now, then," exclaimed Jack as he vanished. Reaching into his pocket he drew out a file, and while Bill Bender raised the Boy Scouts' sled he rapidly filed the runners till they were as rough as newly-molded metal.

"Guess that will fix them," he said, as Sim came panting back to announce that he could find

no gloves. But as both Jack and Bill Bender had known all along that there were no gloves there, this information didn't seem to interest them as much as Sim had expected when he exclaimed:

"I looked low and high, but no gloves could I spy."

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREAT RACE.

TEN minutes before the race was to start, the hill, so bare and unpeopled when the boys climbed it after supper, was alive with a gay throng. Some carried horns which they blew loudly, the harsh notes ringing out and adding to the clamor of tongues. At the starting place a big crowd was gathered, but the densest throng was assembled about the finishing point. Excitement was at a high pitch. The silver cup, for which the race was to be run, had been on exhibition all day in the window of the town jeweler, and had excited great admiration.

"Oh, I do hope our Wolf boys keep it," said a pretty girl from Aquebogue, as she passed, on the arm of her escort.

Men and women from other towns were as eager for their champions to win. Every face shone with anticipation of the coming strug-

gle. At the finish line several photographers, sent to the place by New York papers and periodicals, had their flashlight apparatuses ready to take pictures of the finish. Others stood at the starting point, holding aloft their powder-filled metal troughs and clicking the triggers which would ignite the flashes, impatiently.

About a hundred yards back from the starting line an anxious group was gathered. Rob, Merritt and the others had just made a final inspection and discovered the mischief that had been done to their sleigh. It seemed hopeless to remedy the damage, for it was manifestly impossible to fit new runners, and only in that way could they hope to be in a condition to compete.

"I wonder who was mean enough to do such a thing," wondered Rob.

"The marks of a file are as plain as day," exclaimed Merritt, angrily.

"I'll bet Jack Curtiss or some of his crowd put up this job," grated out Tubby, angrily, gazing toward the bully and his companions, who were

dragging their shining, glittering sled to the starting mark through an admiring crowd.

"Here you, Sim," exclaimed Rob, in what was for him a sharp, angry tone, "did anyone come around the sled while we were gone?"

"No one I could see, not even a flea," rejoined Sim.

"Oh, bother your rhymes. Answer my question. Did you see anyone here, or did you leave the sled while we were gone?"

"I can't tell a fib; leave it I did," was the rejoinder.

"Oh, you did, eh, and after promising to watch it, too," said Merritt angrily. "What do you mean by it?"

He shook his fist menacingly under Sim's pug nose.

"Don't scare him or you won't get a word out of him," warned Rob, coming forward from the sled.

"Who was with it while you left it, Sim?" he asked.

"Until I came back I left it with Jack," responded the shamefaced Sim.

"Hum, just as I thought, fellows," said Rob, turning to his companions; "this was a put-up job. Anyone with Jack?" he demanded sharply.

"His chum Bill Bender, with him did defend her," was the rejoinder.

"Defend her. Did her all the damage they could, I guess you mean," sputtered Tubby. "Hark, fellows! There goes the starting bugle. It's all off," he concluded with a groan.

"Not, yet, we've got three minutes," replied Rob, bravely, although he felt his spirits sink to the lowest ebb.

"Hullo, you fellows, what's the matter? Looks as if you'd dropped a dollar and picked up a dime," came a cheery voice behind them. They turned and saw a tall, sun-burned young fellow regarding them quizzically.

"Some rascals have roughened our runners with a file and we can't compete," was Rob's reply.

"Tough luck," sympathized the other; "we

can't either. I'm captain of the East Willetson team, you know. Two of our men missed their train and can't get here, so we are out of the race."

"Then you're not going to use your sled?" questioned Rob, eagerly.

"No. Hard luck, ain't it? It's a new one, too—a dandy. I think it would beat any of these I see here. However, it can't be helped."

He was moving off, when Rob seized him. The lad began to speak hurriedly, his words tumbling out one after another.

"Say, old man, I don't know your name, but mine is Rob Blake. We had a good chance to win this race if it hadn't been for that bit of foul play. I wonder if we couldn't——"

"Borrow our sled?" shot out the other, guessing the boy's request before he had uttered it. "Sure you can, if the judges won't object."

"I'll ask them," panted Rob, slipping off in the crowd. In a minute he was back.

"They say they don't care," he panted; "where is it?"

"Right back here. Hurry up; there goes the line-up call."

The clear, sharp notes of a bugle rang out, and men and boys began to hurry from all directions. Suddenly there came a disturbance in the crowd. Voices shouted:

"Make way there! Give them room!"

Through the crowd came shoving the Eagle boys, carrying the borrowed sled. In their green and black sweaters, green knitted sleighing caps and khaki trousers they were recognized as contestants.

"Hooray!" shouted the crowd, quick to scent a sensational happening.

"What's all the trouble back there?" asked Jack, in a low voice, of Bill Bender, as they prepared to board their sled.

"Don't know. Seems to be a lot of excitement. Great Hookey, it's those kids!"

"What?"

"Yes. Look for yourself. They've got another sled."

"The dickens they have! I'll protest."

"Better not talk too much. Somebody might know something and squeal, like they did at the aeroplane model race."

"Looks as if they'd overreached us," grumbled Freeman Hunt, who, like Lem Lonsdale, was in the secret of Jack Curtiss' mean trick.

The race was to be run off in heats, on account of the number of contestants. As Jack and his chums were in the first heat, there was no time for more to be said.

"Ready!" cried the starter. Then, as the boys nodded, his pistol cracked, and off darted the gliders, flashing down the hill like so many streaks of brilliant color. Under the bright rays of the suspended electric lights they made a pretty sight, and so the crowd thought, for it cheered them to the echo.

Three heats were run off, and for the finals there lined up the three winners of the preliminary contests. These were the yellow and black Aquebogue Wolves, the holders of the cup, Jack Curtiss' crew, and the Eagle men on their borrowed sled. Jack had started to make a feeble

protest against the loaned sled being entered, but the judges had frowned him down. Afraid that they might have some inkling of who had filed the runners of the "Eagle," he dared not say more.

The East Willetsons' sled proved to be all that its owners had claimed for it. It had captured its heat with ease, shooting across the line a good two feet in front of the nearest competitor. The boys' hearts beat high with hope and excitement. It seemed that there was a chance of their capturing the coveted cup, after all.

"Now then, boys, clap on all sail and come windjamming inter port ahead of the rest of them snow cruisers, or I won't never speak to you again," came the voice of Captain Jeb Hudgins from the crowd behind the starting line.

"He's bet his gray Tomcat's next litter of kittens on you," came the voice of a joker.

"I'll litter you if I get my hooks on yer, yer deck-swabbing lubber," bellowed the captain angrily.

"Ready all!" warned the starter.

The boys gripped the sides of their sled. Rob, who was to steer, tautened a turn of the ropes about his hands.

“Bang!”

Amid a roar from the crowd packed on both sides of the illuminated hill, the three sleds were off. Down the narrow lane, edged with human faces, they flew, Aquebogue, Eagles, and Jack Curtiss’ unnamed crew, neck and neck, so to speak. A great uproar greeted them, but of this the boys were oblivious. Each steersman bent his every effort to getting the most out of his speeding sled.

“Jack Curtiss leads!” came a shout, as that worthy’s sled slightly gained on the other two at a spot where the grade was not quite so steep as the remainder of the way.

“How-oooo!” came deep-throatedly from the Wolves’ supporters.

“Come on you!” hissed the Aquebogue steersman, swaying his body back and forth. But try as he would, he could not shake off the Eagles. On they flew; the finish line, with its close-packed

rows of white faces, stared straight in front of them now.

Jack Curtiss was in the lead by a very slight margin; then came the Eagles, with the Wolves right on their rear runners. But, in an unlucky moment, Bill Bender glanced back and saw how close Rob and his chums were upon them. With a sly move, he thrust out his foot, intending to sway the Eagles' sled off its course. Instead, however, the unexpected drag caused his own sled to swerve. Amid a cry from the crowd, it swung round before Jack Curtiss could stop it, and went plunging up a bank through the crowd, narrowly avoiding injuring several people.

In the meantime, the Eagles' borrowed sled, with Aquebogue a close second, flashed across the roaring, yelling, horn-blowing finish line, amid a perfect bombardment of "Boom! Boom! Boom!" from the flashlight artists.

"They threw us over. They did it!"

"It's their fault!"

Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender, followed by their

two cronies, came rushing up as a congratulatory crowd pressed about the cup winners.

Jack shook his fist angrily in Rob's face.

"You stole the race!" he bellowed furiously. "We had it won."

"Won by a mile!" declared Freeman Hunt.

"By a file, you mean," shot out Rob, looking straight into the other's eyes. Jack Curtiss' gaze wavered and fell.

"Come on, fellows. Let's leave the babies to have their candy," he sneered, as, amid the hoots and laughter of the crowd, he and his cronies slouched off.

CHAPTER XX.

A SCHOONER IN TROUBLE.

"ANY of you fellows going down to the water front?" asked Paul Perkins, one bitter Saturday morning. The air was bound in iron fetters. Hard, black ice froze up the creek behind his house—the same creek which had supplied the water to quench the wagon house fire—and a chill wind was sweeping in from the sea.

"The water front?" echoed Tubby, who, with Rob and Merritt Crawford, had dropped into Paul's on their way to the Red Mill pond, where they meant to enjoy some skating.

"You must need a bath awfully badly if you're going to plunge in to-day," added the stout youth.

"I'm going down to overhaul the iceaeromobile," declared Paul, who had a big monkey wrench in his hand. "I've got it down in Redding's boathouse now. It was the only place I

could find to store it. Sam Redding let me put it there."

"That was white of Sam," declared Rob. "What a change there is in that fellow since he emerged from the influence of Bill Bender and his crowd."

"I should say so," agreed Merritt. "Say, fellows, let's go down and see how the machine looks. Maybe Paul will give her a try-out, eh, Paul?"

"Don't know," rejoined the inventive youth. "If the ice is over the Inlet good and firm, we might try it. I'd like to, all right."

"I heard it was thick enough to bear a wagon," chimed in Merritt. "Wow! feel that wind blow. If there's any ship off shore, she'll have a hard time beating up into it."

"That's right," agreed Rob; "but come on; let's be getting down to Redding's. I'd like to have another good look at Paul's gasoline bobsled."

The boys were soon at the boatyard. Under a canvas cover, as they entered, they could see

the outlines of Sam's hydroplane—the one which had caused them so much trouble when the Eagle Patrol was first organized. Other yachts stood about, shrouded mysteriously in their winter coverings. Their bare spars looked odd and melancholy, sticking up like leafless trees in the bitter wind.

As they had noticed, it was unusually cold, and the wind from off the sea came sweeping in with force enough to drive their breaths back when they faced it. The Inlet was covered for half its breadth with a sheet of dull, iron gray ice, hummocky as a plowed field in places. Beyond, they could see the cold, steel-blue sea, breaking in showers of spray on the narrow strip of sand and brush which separated the Inlet from the open ocean and formed a breakwater. It was a depressing scene, and the chilliness and cheerlessness of it was added to by the shrieking voice of the wind whipping round the sharp angles of the boatyard buildings.

"Look!" cried Merritt suddenly, pointing seaward. "Isn't that a schooner off there?"

He pointed to the southeast, where a small sailing vessel of some kind could be seen beating up into the wind, evidently making desperate efforts to keep off the coast.

"She's pretty close in," commented Rob. "They'll have their hands full to claw her off."

"What is she?" inquired Paul. "I can't make out her rig."

"Looks like a two-masted schooner from here," said Rob. "My! but she's eating up into that wind like a good one."

"She'll need to," commented Merritt, as they entered the boathouse in which the motor-scooter stood installed, like a mechanical horse. For two hours or more they worked with Paul over the strange craft, rigging an inclined support for the gasoline tank. At last it was completed, to the young inventor's satisfaction. He declared that the fuel would feed more rapidly, now that the improvement had been made.

The job completed, they emerged from the boathouse, having persuaded Paul to join the skating party. But what they saw as they came

into full view of the sea drove all thoughts of skating out of their minds. The schooner they had noticed earlier in the day was now about off the Hampton Inlet beach. But she was so close in that they could almost see the figures moving about on her decks.

"Gee-hos-o-phat!" shouted Tubby. "She'll be in the surf in another fifteen minutes."

The others agreed with him. Desperately as the crew of the small, two-masted schooner were working to keep her out of the turmoil of the wind-driven breakers, she was being slowly but surely driven into the vortex.

"She won't live in them an hour," exclaimed Rob. "Remember what happened to the Sea Horse when she went ashore off there two years ago?"

"A few of her ribs are there yet, and that's about all," agreed Merritt, "and she was a large vessel."

"Wonder if the life savers at Lone Hill know about her," exclaimed Paul. "Maybe we'd better telephone."

"Good idea," agreed Rob. "Is there one around here anywhere?"

"There's one in the yacht club. I've got a key—we'll use that," said Tubby, heading a hasty dash for the clubhouse. They were soon in the gloomy, closed-up place, and Rob made for the telephone.

"Hullo, Central! Give me Quogue 212," he said. "There's a schooner driving ashore. * * * What? Good gracious, you don't say so! That's hard luck!"

"Say, fellows," he exclaimed, turning with a downcast face from the instrument, "she says that the wires are out of order, and there's no chance of getting the life savers."

"Well, one of the beach patrols is bound to sight her before long," said Merritt.

"But before long she'll be ashore. Let's see! Are the club field-glasses on that table? Let's borrow them and take a look at her."

The glasses were soon being brought to bear on the storm-stressed schooner. She was making a brave fight for it, driving eastward rapidly,

and looking, from where they were observing her, to be almost in the midst of the tossing, crashing breakers.

"Sa-ay!" exclaimed Rob, drawing a long breath, as he handed the glasses to Merritt, "there's a woman on that schooner."

"Wh-at!"

The exclamation came from all the lads simultaneously.

"That's right," confirmed Merritt the next minute. "I can see her standing at the stern. Seems to be right by the wheel."

Their faces grew grave, as in turn they gazed at the little vessel clawing valiantly for sea room, but being beaten back on every tack.

"From the way she acts I guess her rudder's broken," reasoned Rob. "It seems as if she won't head into that wind, and from her rig she ought to do a whole lot better than she is doing."

Suddenly Paul, who was holding the glasses, uttered a sharp cry. His face was pale as the

others turned to him to find out the reason for his exclamation.

"Say, fellows, there's a kid—a little fellow on board there, too."

"The dickens!"

"That's right. Gee Willikens, can't we do anything but stand here like a lot of clams? We are a fine bunch of Boy Scouts," burst out Rob.

"We might walk across the ice," suggested Tubby.

"Two miles over that ice? We couldn't do it in two hours," vetoed Rob. "I wish we had an ice-scooter. There are some at Aquebogue, but that doesn't do us any good."

"That's so," the others were forced to admit.

"Anyhow," put in the practical Merritt, "a scooter wouldn't be any good. We could never beat up into that wind with her."

"I've got it!" cried Rob suddenly, in a sharp, excited voice. "Say, Paul, now's the time to try out your iceaero-what-you-may-call-um."

"Jumping bob cats, Rob Blake, do you think we can do it with that?" gasped Tubby.

"I think so, if the ice will bear. It's thick enough to carry a scooter, all right, and that thing-um-me-bob isn't much heavier. Can you run her, Paul?" he added, with sudden anxiety.

"Can a duck swim?" came back the indignant reply. "All I've got to do is to turn on the gasoline and the switch, tickle the carburetor, and off we go."

"Then we'll try it. I'm not going to see a woman and a kid go to Davy Jones without stirring a finger to help them," declared Rob. "Come on, fellows. Tubby you get a coil of rope; there's some in that locker, plenty of it—come on, boys, we haven't got any time to be talking, either."

Off they darted, and by the time Tubby joined them with two or three coils of half-inch manila rope, the others had the iceaeromobile out by way of the big front doors that opened seaward, and led on to a runway sloping downward into what had been water, but now was ice. At the top of the runway they made a rope fast to the stern of the odd craft, and then, taking a turn

round a big iron "crab," paid out the rope gradually till Paul's invention stood on, what he intended to be, her native element.

The rope was then cast off, and the Boy Scouts crowded aboard, Tubby and Merritt clinging on behind the seat, while Paul seated himself in the driver's place. Rob, after being carefully instructed, ran to the stern to work the aeroplane propeller, which was expected to drive the queer craft forward. While he did this, Paul shoved forward a lever which dug a spiked brake down into the ice, holding the craft firm till the engine was working in good shape.

In the intense cold it was necessary to prime the engine—that is, inject gasolene into it from a cup on top of the cylinders for that purpose, before it would start. Finally, after a lot of swinging of the propeller, there came a sharp explosion.

"Chug!"

"Hooray!" shouted Merritt and Tubby, as a whiff of blue smoke was whipped shoreward by the wind.

"Pup-pup! Pur-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r! Pup!"

"She's off!" yelled Paul.

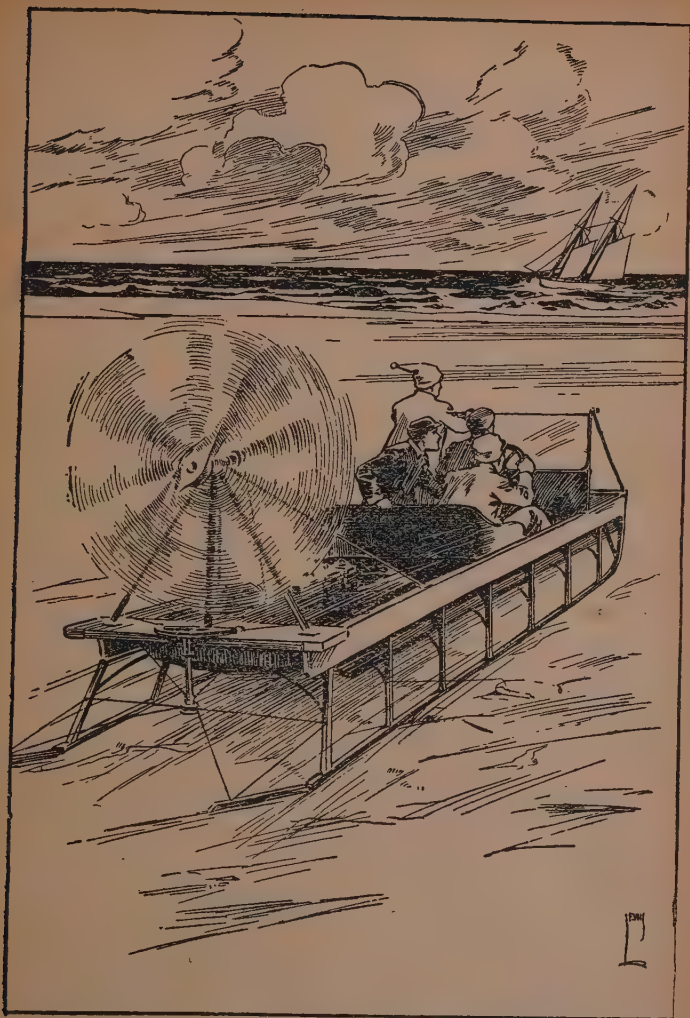
"All aboard!" shouted Merritt, as Rob darted forward, being careful to avoid the rapidly whirring propeller, which would have beheaded him at one sweep if it had struck him. He swung himself into the seat beside Paul, digging in with his "toenails," as he expressed it afterward. The next instant Paul released the lever which manipulated the brake.

Like an arrow from a bow, off shot the ice-aeromobile, scooting across the ice at such a pace that it fairly took their breaths away.

"She works!" yelled Paul, throttling the engine down a bit as they dashed along.

"Of course, she does," shouted Rob back in his ear above the roaring of the engine, "and she's getting a great trial trip."

To the eastward, where she was now being driven, they could see the schooner. Paul gave his steering wheel a slight twist, swinging over the front bob. Obediently the iceaeromobile



Like an arrow from a bow, off shot the ice-aeromobile, scooting across the ice at such a pace that it fairly took their breaths away.

swung around, too, answering her helm as a perfectly-trained horse obeys his bridle.

"Paul, you're a blessed genius!" shouted one of the passengers, clinging on for dear life behind. But the wind whipped his words shoreward without their being heard by the lads on the seat.

Over the ice, for two miles or more up the Inlet, which branched out and ran eastward at this point, the motor ice-scooter drove. It was rough riding, but none of them minded that. The fact—the glorious fact that they were riding in such a craft as no man or boy had ever ridden in before—was a tonic in their veins. They could have sung aloud for joy if the cold had not cracked their lips and dried their faces.

"There's the De Regny mansion," shouted Rob, pointing shoreward at the gloomy old place among its dark trees. "Say, we've covered the distance in ten minutes. I wouldn't have believed it possible."

"The ice doesn't offer much resistance," shouted back Paul modestly.

At last the head of the Inlet was reached, and Paul shut off his engine. A lever thrown into place acted on an ingenious arrangement of cogs and reversed the propeller. With the aid of his spiked brake, the young inventor brought his mile-a-minute craft to a dead stop within two hundred feet of the place where he first shut off the power. The iceaeromobile had been tried and not found wanting.

But other things than the success of Paul's invention engaged their attention now. Not more than half a mile from them the schooner was laboring bravely still, when something happened that proved the beginning of the end. The boys saw her foresails torn bodily from their ropes by the wind, and sent scurrying like birds, inland, toward the De Regny house. The next instant, deprived of all means of keeping her head up to the seas, the schooner broached to. Almost before they could realize what had occurred, the doomed vessel was in the midst of the rolling breakers.

As they gazed, a cry of horror went up from

the boys. It was fairly forced from their throats by the apparent hopelessness of the schooner's position. Like a helpless log, she was driven shoreward, while over her and about her the green seas lifted and broke as if in triumph at their victory.

CHAPTER XXI.

MOTOR-SCOOTERS TO THE RESCUE.

"GREAT guns, we're too late!" groaned Merritt.

"No. See! she's not awash yet," cried Rob. "Look! they are climbing into her rigging. Come on, fellows, run as you never ran before."

It was hard work plowing along that soft beach with the bitter wind fighting them every inch of the way, but the Boy Scouts stuck to it doggedly. Before long they were opposite the turmoil of waters in which the unfortunate schooner lay.

To their astonishment, however, she was not in such a desperate plight as had at first seemed the case. Her decks were still unswept by the waves, although, occasionally, a big sea would break against her side and fling a smother of spray almost as big as her topmasts.

"She's stuck on that sandy shoal the captain told us about," said Rob comprehendingly. "It

runs along the beach here at just about the distance she lies off shore."

"I wish those life savers were here with their gun," exclaimed Tubby. "We've got lots of rope here, but how are we going to reach them?"

This problem, however, was solved more easily than they imagined. A bearded man clambered into the lee rigging as he spied the party on the shore, and, after a dozen attempts, succeeded in flinging a light line with a leaden weight attached to it to the beach. The wind helped him, or otherwise he could not have succeeded, but as it happened, Providence was good to the stranded schooner in this respect, at least.

Seizing up the light line, the boys ran back on the beach with it, and guided by the man's gesticulations, they began to haul on it for all they were worth. Presently it was seen that a heavier line was attached to the first one, and was evidently intended to serve as a life rope between the vessel and the shore.

The lads cast about them for some place to which to make the line fast. Soon they spied

the gaunt framework of an old range light, long disused. The timbers seemed stout, however, and in a jiffy they had the line fastened with two double half hitches on the uprights. In the meantime, the men on the schooner had made their end fast.

Before taking this latter action, they had slid the rope through the handles of a stout basket, intending, it seemed, to use it in getting ashore. As the rope was inclined at quite a steep angle, this looked as if it would be an easy matter. As the boys waited for the first person to take the perilous trip over and through the waves, some members of the crew began handing the woman and child up the shrouds. But before they could get anywhere near the basket, a man's form was seen to dash past them, pushing them so roughly aside that they were almost projected into the sea. The next instant the intruder was in the basket and several feet out from the ship's side. On he came toward the beach, clawing at the line and pulling himself along, hand over hand. The bearded man had leaped into the rigging and was

shaking his fist furiously after him, but he was far too engrossed with securing a safe passage for himself to pay any attention to this.

"He's a fine coward, whoever he is," commented Rob, as the man in the basket neared the shore. But at this point the weight on the rope caused it to sag till the basket was immersed completely in the immense waves. Gasping and fighting for breath, they could see the crawling figure on the rope emerge again and again from the vortex of one of the big waves. At last, with a howl of anguish, he vanished altogether. As the wave that had engulfed him rolled on shoreward, it could be seen that there was nothing on the line. The force of the big sea had torn the basket off, and hurled its living freight into the turmoil of water.

The Boy Scouts dashed down the beach to watch for the man's reappearance. As the big wave broke, they saw him. Rolled helplessly up the beach in the tumble of waters, he would have been drawn back when the wave receded, but for the fact that Rob had already acted. Rapidly in-

structing the others to form a chain, of which Tubby acted as the anchor, the leader of the Eagle Patrol waded waist deep into the water. Just as the wave was about to drag back its prey, the boy's strong arms closed around the man, who was by this time unconscious, and dragged him up upon the beach.

As the boys gazed down into the features of the man they had rescued, they broke into involuntary exclamations of amazement. The man was no stranger to any of them.

It was Hank Handcraft, the former beachcomber. A thick beard now covered the lower part of his face, but about his identity there could be no question.

"Drag him further up the beach," ordered Rob, their first surprise over. "I've no idea how he comes to be out of prison, but we've no time to worry over that now."

A shout from Merritt, who had been gazing down the beach, caused them all to turn their heads from the unconscious man.

"Hooray! Here comes the life savers!" he

cried, and sure enough, from the direction in which he pointed, came the brave beach patrolmen from the Lone Hill Life Saving Station. Two stout horses dragged their "rope-gun" and a large dory boat. Hasty explanations were soon exchanged between Captain Ed Baker of the life savers and the boys, all of whom knew him well. While these were being made, the men of the Life Saving Station rigged a line, and presently a sharp report was heard as their rope flew seaward and fell over the deck of the schooner. It was soon made fast, and then a breeches buoy was sent across. The first person to come ashore in it was the woman they had seen on their wild trip across the ice. She clasped in her arms a little lad about four years old.

Rob and the boys were set to work by Captain Baker with the medicine chest, administering restoratives to the woman. She explained to them that she was the wife of Captain Tom Pratt, the skipper and owner of the schooner, the Vesper of New York. They had set sail the day before, bound for the West Indies, and with-

out a cargo. The gale which they encountered at midnight had proven too much for them, and for ten terrible hours they waited for death.

Tubby, who had been looking after Hank Handcraft, announced presently that the man showed signs of life, and was coming to. This induced Rob to ask Mrs. Pratt if she knew anything about the fellow. She replied that she did not. He had shipped at the vessel's Brooklyn wharf only the day before, and her husband being short a man had signed him on.

Before long all the crew were ashore. The last man to make the voyage in the breeches buoy was Captain Tom Pratt. He thanked the boys warmly, and he and his wife could not say too much in praise of their bravery and that of the life saving crew.

Hank Handcraft had, by this time, recovered, and had recognized the boys with a wild cry of surprise in which alarm mingled. He begged them piteously not to be hard on him. He had escaped from the western penitentiary in which he had been confined and had made his way east,

he said, and then shipped on the Vesper in hopes of beginning a new life in the West Indies.

"We won't cause you any trouble as long as you behave yourself," Rob promised him. "But I can't answer for the captain of the Vesper," he said, as Tom Pratt approached with thunder in his eye.

"You miserable varmint! You yaller dog!" he exclaimed. "I've a notion to throw you back inter the sea, if it wasn't that even the waves would throw you back again. This feller, boys," he exclaimed, turning to the life savers, "threw my wife aside and tried to save himself on the life line them brave boys helped us rig up."

A low, angry growl came from the life savers, and Pratt's crew advanced threateningly upon Hank. The wretched creature threw himself on his knees and whimpered like a baby as he saw these danger signals.

"Bah! Leave him alone," said Captain Pratt disgustedly, turning to his wife. "I wouldn't soil my hands on the critter."

The boys' motor-scooter—which caused great

wonderment to the life savers and the rescued crew, as may be imagined—did good work in taking the shipwrecked men ashore. A big crowd met them on their first trip, and the cheers that went up for the Boy Scouts were deafening. They reached the ears of Jack Curtiss and his crowd, and of Stonington Hunt. The former broker was as vindictively malicious as the others when he heard that his enemies, as he designated them, had again distinguished themselves.

“I’ll be even with them yet,” he grated out.

“Sneaking into the limelight again,” sniffed Jack, as he and his chums joined the crowd on the water front.

Hank Handcraft was the last to be brought over, but none in the crowd recognized him with his heavy beard and pale, woe-begone face. With a growled-out, grudging word of thanks, he parted from the Boy Scouts and made his way up the village street. But he was not to go altogether unrecognized. Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender, after an incredulous glance, were con-

vinced they had made no mistake in their man, and followed him up.

"Hank!" exclaimed Jack, coming up behind the fellow and laying his hand on his shoulder.

"Jumping periwinkles! It's Jack Curtiss!" exclaimed Hank. "The very fellow I want to see, too. Have you got a quiet place we can go and where you can give me a good drink?—and I'll tell you something that's worth your while."

"Worth while. What are you getting at?" exclaimed Jack incredulously. for he knew Hank of old. "I heard about your escape. Why, you are just an escaped convict. What can you know that's worth while?"

"I know there is two thousand dollars in good money right on that schooner," was the astonishing response, "and if you keep me hid and the boat don't break up I'll pay you well for your trouble."

"Sure you're not at your old tricks, Hank?" questioned Jack and Bill, in one breath.

"No; it's true as gospel. You believe me, don't you?"

The outcast, wet, dripping, and miserable as he was, had a convincing ring in his voice as he hinted at his improbable tale.

But Jack was so dishonest and unreliable himself that he applied the same standards to everybody else—and with some justice in Hank's case. He, therefore, made a non-committal reply.

"I know a place where I can hide you, Hank," he said, "till we find out if your yarn is true or not. In the meantime, come on and get on some dry clothes, and throw a feed into yourself. Then you can tell us your story. If you're lying to us, it will go hard with you."

"I wish I were as sure of going to heaven as I am that there is two thousand dollars on that schooner," grunted Hank, in reply.

CHAPTER XXII.

JIM DUGAN AGAIN.

As you can readily imagine, it was some time before the fame of the lads' exploit in going to the rescue of the crew of the stranded Vesper died out. All the praise that came their way, however, the lads accepted without undue self-satisfaction. In fact, everybody else seemed to consider what they had done as being much more remarkable than they themselves did.

"If it hadn't been for Captain Baker's Lone Hill fellows, we wouldn't have got anybody off," was the way Rob put it.

One person there was in town who heard the news with an added interest, apart from the thrilling details of the actual work of getting the men through the surf. This man was Stonington Hunt. After hearing of the performance of the motor-scooter, he was more convinced than ever that the machine was a practicable inven-

tion, in which it would pay him handsomely to secure a controlling interest. As he himself often said, he was not a man to be easily beaten, and presently, after much casting about and quiet investigation, he lighted on a plan which he considered would place Paul's interests in his hands and compel the boy to sell him the rights to the manufacture of other Motor-Scooters. What this plan was we shall see ere long.

In the meantime, nothing more had been heard of the former beach-comber who had so mysteriously reappeared and then vanished again. Although they made inquiries, none of the boys could find out what had become of him, and all their investigations along this line came to nothing. The Vesper still lay on the sand bar on which she had grounded. She had been fully insured, so Captain Pratt did not suffer great loss, and the insurance company, after a survey of the spot in which she lay, decided that it would be impracticable to remove her. She was a stout Nova Scotian built vessel, of good oak and pine, and, despite the buffeting she had been through,

held together almost as intact as when she first grounded. The boys often planned to take an excursion to her some fine day in the spring, when the sea was more moderate than it was in the winter.

Toward the middle of April, the Boy Scouts decided that their organization was flourishing to such a degree that they needed more spacious quarters than those above the bank of which Rob's father was president, and a large barn-like building on the main street—formerly a seine-net factory—being vacant, was fitted up as an armory, not all at once, of course, but by degrees. A minstrel show and other entertainments helped pay the expenses of fitting up the new quarters, and when they were completed no patrol in the state could boast more commodious or comfortable headquarters.

With the coming of spring, Lieutenant Duvall returned and took up his residence in the old De Regny mansion, and several other officers of the signal corps came with him. The arrival of half a dozen or more mysterious boxes and crates at

the house gave rise to rumors that the government was going to carry out some extensive aeronautical experiments as soon as the weather grew favorable, and, naturally, among the most curious persons concerning these doings were our lads.

They got little satisfaction from the young officer, however. Although they were always welcome guests at the De Regny place, they understood that the experiments about to be carried out were in the nature of secret tests, and, after their first questions had been politely but firmly unanswered, they asked no more. This did not detract a bit, though, from the enjoyment they found in visiting the place on Saturday afternoons, and watching the private soldiers of the Signal Corps equipping the aeroplanes for the spring and summer work. "Spring styles in aeroplanes," Tubby called it.

From time to time, however, the officer in charge of the station let drop a hint here and there which convinced the boys that the experi-

ments were to be in the main devoted to testing the deadliness of dropped explosives and bombs.

One of the officer's expansive moments came one afternoon when they were on the brick terrace watching the trying out of a new engine on a large biplane.

"I'd like to see how near I could come to putting that old hulk out of the way," he remarked, waving his hand seaward to where the black hull of the wrecked Vesper lay, her two masts stretched up like appealing hands.

"Drop a bomb on her, you mean?" asked Tubby, with round eyes.

"Yes. She'd make a fine mark. A good thing to have her out of the way, too. I think I'll try to see if the department can't have it arranged."

"It would be a great sight!" agreed Rob. "I'd like to see it. I suppose one of your projectiles would blow her to bits, if you hit her fair and square."

"Well, there wouldn't be much left to bother over," admitted the lieutenant.

While this conversation was going on between

the boys and the friendly young officer, a vastly different scene was transpiring in a room at the Southport Hospital, which was situated some miles from Hampton. In a private room there, Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender were seated by the bedside of a gaunt, pallid man, who had evidently just recovered from a severe illness. The man was Hank Handcraft, but so emaciated was he that any one would have had some difficulty in recognizing him. He had collapsed from the strain of his life since escaping from the prison in the west, and had become so ill that Jack and his cronies had found it necessary to have him removed from the small cottage belonging to Jack's father, in which they had hoped to hide him till the time was ripe for investigating the wreck.

A problem had then faced the lads which was not solved till Stonington Hunt was taken into the secret. He possessed some influence at the hospital and on his word that Hank Handcraft was a reputable man named James Smiley, the former beach-comber had been admitted there.

Stonington Hunt was not influenced by philanthropy in this matter. His main desire was to see Hank get well speedily so that he could guide them to the location of the money on the wrecked Vesper.

On this spring afternoon Jack and Bill had visited the hospital and were readily admitted to the sickroom.

"But I must warn you, gentlemen, that James Smiley is a very sick man, and you must not bother him or excite him," the house surgeon had said, as they left the office in charge of a nurse.

"Has he been delirious lately, Miss Jones?"

"No, sir, not since daybreak," was the reply; "but last night, so the night nurse told me, he raved and talked for hour after hour about some money hidden on a ship."

"Strange, isn't it, what delusions a sick man will get?" mused the surgeon.

The boys were shocked, in spite of their hard, callous natures, at the change for the worse in Hank's appearance since they had seen him a week before.

"Come, Hank, you must brace up," said Jack, as the nurse left the room and they were alone. "It will soon be time to take a trip to the Vesper for that coin."

"I shall never go," rejoined Hank gloomily; "but I have drawn a rough map here to show you where I hid the money in a crack behind some beams in the fore-castle. You must get it, and I must trust to you to divide it fairly with me."

"We'll do that, Hank," Bill assured him.

"Where's the map?" asked Jack, a greedy light coming into his hard eyes.

Hank stretched an emaciated arm forth and drew from under his mattress a crumpled bit of paper.

"It's the third beam from the foot of the companionway steps," he said. "You can't miss it with this map to guide you. See, it is all set down here."

He indicated some lines and marks on the paper, which Jack promptly took and pocketed. After some more conversation, they left the sick

man and set out for their trip back to Hampton.

"Poor Hank, I think he was right. He has not long to live, I'm afraid," said Bill Bender, as they were strolling down the road leading to the station.

"If he should die before we get the money," said Jack, in a low voice, "then we would not have to divide it. It would be all ours."

"Yes, if he isn't giving us a fairy tale," said Bill Bender. "That story of his about how he and another fellow—a tramp he met—broke into a post office and robbed it of that money sounds rather fishy to me. What would all that money be doing in a country post office?"

"He explained that," said Jack; "it was in Montana and the money was deposited in the post office safe to pay off the miners at a copper mine not far off. It was the only safe place they could put it in that lawless country."

"They got wind of it from overhearing the postmaster telling a friend about it, didn't they?" asked Bill.

"That was the way Hank tells it. His tramp friend made a mixture of some stuff Hank called 'soup' and squirted it into the cracks of the safe door with an oil can. Then they blew off the door and escaped."

"I'll bet Hank is mad with himself for getting too scared to take it with him when he left the wreck," said Bill.

"I'll bet he is," agreed Jack carelessly; "but that is not our funeral."

That evening there was a consultation at Stonington Hunt's home. Jack and Bill related what they had heard from Hank and exhibited the map. Stonington Hunt seemed overjoyed. Rising from the table, he went to the door and looked out into the night. It was still and calm, one of those breathless, starry nights that come in early spring.

"Well, when will we take a trip out there?" he asked, coming back to his seat. "It looks to-night as if we'd have a perfect day to-morrow. What do you say if we make a try for it, then?"

"Suits me," said Jack. "How about you fellows?"

"Same here," said Freeman, falling in with the rest.

"But won't any one be suspicious if they see us leaving the harbor in a boat?" asked Bill Bender cautiously.

"Why should they be?" demanded Stonington Hunt, his crafty eyes glittering with greedy anticipation. "There are several launches in the water already. We'll hire one and say we are going outside on a fishing trip. We'll take squids and bait and lines as a blind. No one will suspect, and the wreck lies away up the beach off that old house in the hemlocks where those army idiots are experimenting."

"I heard they are going to take up bomb-dropping practice," said Jack, in a careless voice.

"Hope they don't drop one on us," laughed Bill Bender.

* * * * *

"Rob," said his father that evening after supper, "I had a letter this afternoon from Job

Trevor, that garage man at Willitson. He incloses a bill for one hundred and fifty dollars. I thought I had paid it, but evidently I had not. Wonder if you'd go over there, provided you have nothing better to do."

"Of course, I'll go, dad," said Rob willingly. "We had a drill on for to-night, but Merritt can take it for me. Anyway, I guess I can get over there and back in time to be present at it."

"Thank you, my boy," said his father. "I don't care to let bills run up, and, as you say, you ought to get there and back in time for your drill if you hurry."

"Oh, I'll hurry," Rob assured him.

The leader of the Eagles 'phoned to Merritt that he might be delayed a little on his errand and asked the corporal to take charge in his absence. Merritt readily agreed to do this, and Rob, whistling a merry tune, hastened off to the shed at the rear of the house in which Mr. Blake's auto was kept, to prepare for his trip. Soon afterward he chugged out of the yard and was off. It was about ten miles to Willitson,

and Rob was not particularly observant of the speed laws as he cut across the island. It was exhilarating sport, speeding along on the deserted roads. Once he met another auto. It was going almost as fast as he was, and the two vehicles whizzed by each other at tremendous speed. They did not go so fast, however, that the occupants of the other car did not turn and look back into the darkness.

"Look here, Dugan," said one of them, a small, yellow-faced man—a Jap, in fact, "wasn't that face familiar to you in the flash we had of it?"

"Only got a glance at it," rejoined the driver of the car, a heavy-set, big-jowled man, with an immense pair of shoulders; "but it did seem to me I'd seen it some place before."

"That was one of the boys that attacked us on the road that day, Dugan," rejoined Hashi, with a vindictive snarl.

"It was," snorted Dugan angrily. "I wish I'd known that, I'd have run him down."

"You forget that to-night we want to make ourselves as inconspicuous as possible," was the

rejoinder. "You had better keep a sharp look-out—we are nearing the town now, I think."

"That's right. We'll run the car off on this side lane and wait till it's late enough for us to start working."

"Ha! ha!" chuckled the Jap. "We remind me of those funny pills. Work while they sleep, eh, my friend?"

"Well, I hope they sleep," grunted Dugan, turning off the main road into a rough cart-track. "If they don't, they are likely to get some pills they don't like—lead ones."

"I hope you are too much of an expert not to be able to extract a paper from a country bank without rousing the whole town," said the Jap uneasily.

"Don't worry about me, Hashi, old boy. I'll do the trick with neatness and dispatch, and when I'm at the head of the Japanese Aero Squad we'll have many a good laugh over this night."

As he spoke, the car came to a stop, and the two occupants got out and stretched their legs.

It appeared that they had ridden a long way and were stiff and cramped.

"Better put out the lights," said Dugan. As he spoke, he bent over the headlights, and before he extinguished them drew out his watch.

"Eight o'clock," he muttered. "It's a long time we've got to wait."

"In the contemplation of great achievements, the hours pass pleasantly," rejoined the Jap philosophically, clambering back into the car and making himself a snug nest with the blankets and robes. Presently he slept, but Dugan, leaning against the car, gazed with speculative eyes from the hilltop down toward the spot where a faint glow marked the site of the village of Hampton.

"It's a risky game, Jim Dugan," he growled to himself, "but you're playing for the biggest stake that you ever saw."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A CHASE IN THE NIGHT.

BUT Rob was disappointed in his hopes of getting back early to Hampton. In fact, he encountered a regular chapter of accidents to delay him. In the first place, the man he had come to see was not in, and he had to wait for an hour till he put in an appearance.

In the meantime, he had telephoned to Hampton that he might not be back till late, so that he knew the drill would go on without him, and this helped to make the wait less aggravating.

He set out for home at a good speed, but hardly had he gone two hundred yards beyond the garage he had visited, than "pop!" went a rear tire. By the light of a detached headlight, Rob examined it and found, to his dismay, that he had run over a broken bottle in the darkness and cut through both inner and outer tubes. That meant a long delay, for he knew what coun-

try garages were. However, there was no help for it, and, amid jeering cries of "Get a horse" from East Willitson small boys, he summoned help and wheeled the car back to the repair place.

This was not the sum of his troubles, however. The repair man's helper was an awkward youth, who apparently knew more about plows and harrows than he did about automobiles. At any rate, he succeeded in smashing part of the steering gear as they were jacking the car up, which required still further time to set it to rights.

As he left the garage, Rob saw, to his amazement (for long as the delay had been, he had not dreamed it was so late) that it was almost midnight.

"Got to hustle if I'm going to get any sleep," thought the lad to himself as he bade the garage man "good-night," the latter having magnanimously refused to take any pay for the repairing of the break caused by his helper's carelessness.

Once out of the place, however, he made good time, till within a mile of home, when something

went wrong with the radiator, which necessitated a further delay.

“Good thing we’re an orderly, law-abiding community down here,” thought Rob, smiling to himself, “or I would offer a good opportunity to an enterprising hold-up man. By George! Old Jenkins, the constable, is laid up with a smashed ankle, too. Well, Jenkins wasn’t capable of much anyhow, except to carry that big star around against a suitable background. Now, then, Mr. Radiator, if you’re ready we’ll go on.”

So saying—or rather thinking—the lad got back into the car and set off once more, the cheerful song of the motor delighting him after its temporary fit of backsliding.

In a few minutes he was at the head of the village street, dark, and deserted, of course, at that hour. Presently the white outline of the bank, the only stone building in the village, came into view, and as it did so Rob gave an amazed exclamation:

“Why, there’s a light in there. Wonder who

can be working late. I thought Jennings and the rest had——. Hullo!”

The light had gone out as suddenly as if a hand had been placed over it. Plucky as he was, Rob could not repress an involuntary shiver.

“There’s something wrong,” he said to himself. He muffled down the motor and stopped half a block or more from the bank building. Then, with a heart that beat so hard that it shook his frame, he began cautiously tiptoeing down the darkened street. He kept on till he reached the bank, and then catching hold of the window coping, he raised himself silently till he could peer through the big plate glass window into the interior. At first it seemed as black as a pit in there and Rob began to think that his eyes might have played him a trick.

But the next instant he knew they hadn’t. At the rear of the main floor of the bank a sudden tiny glow of light flashed. No bigger than the midget lantern of a fire-fly it seemed, but as Rob’s eyes encountered it he knew that some human agency was at work within.

And now the light began to come closer and Rob guessed that it was a pocket electric torch. Whoever was carrying it came to the door—which was opened, it seemed, and peered out.

"All clear," this figure muttered to itself, while Rob, who had dropped from the window at its approach, cowered back against the wall as flat as he could make himself.

And now Rob could hear, from the back of the bank, a queer, rasping noise. It sounded not unlike the harsh drone of big bumble bees. What could it be? His ignorance was soon to be enlightened.

"Keep that drill quiet, Dugan," came from the man at the door; "you will wake the whole town up."

Instantly the noise stopped, and as it did so the man at the door was joined by another. Hardly had the second dark figure glided into view before there was a muffled roar from within the bank and the ground vibrated under Rob's feet.

Like a flash, the words of Lieutenant Duvall flashed into his mind:

"Dugan, I have found out, was once an expert safe-blower."

The second figure had been addressed as Dugan. From what Rob could make out of the hazy outline of his big frame, it was the deserter. Evidently what had just happened was the blowing open of the big safe which served the Hampton bank in place of a strong room. With a swift flash of intuition the lad realized what was taking place. The two rascals, of whom the first was undoubtedly the Jap, were after the plans of Lieutenant Duvall's equalizer.

"I'll fix them," thought Rob, feeling in his pocket for his Boy Scout alarm whistle. Three blasts on it would bring the Eagles and the Hawks about him in a jiffy, all those within hearing, that is.

But before he blew the alarm Rob was prudent enough to softly tiptoe to a safe distance. So silently did he proceed that he did not believe it was possible for the men in the bank to have heard him. But the next instant he was undeceived. Rob had been seen, and the Jap had

crept after him as silently as he himself had progressed.

"Drop that whistle or I shall be compelled to shoot you," said a soft voice in the startled boy's ear. As the purring accents reached him, Rob could feel the chilly impress of a revolver muzzle against the back of his neck. With a quick, snake-like turn, Rob ducked and fairly slid up under the astonished Jap's arm before the other could realize what had happened. With a quick wrench the Oriental was dispossessed of the pistol, and Rob, master of the situation, placed the whistle to his lips, while with the other hand he leveled the revolver at the quaking Jap.

Three shrill calls rang out clear and loud on the early morning air.

"Now you stand there till they come and put you in the lock-up," warned Rob, standing motionless as a statue before the yellow man, and keeping the pistol pointed straight at him.

"Truly you have me in a trap, honorable youth," said the Jap. "I weep for my native Nippon, which I fear I may never see again."

He seemed to be overcome with an excess of grief, and moved one hand downward.

"Don't move," snapped out Rob, devoutly hoping his companions would be quick.

"My handkerchief, honorable sir," sobbed the Jap; "may I not dry my tears?"

"I'll get it for you," said Rob, sternly, and leaning forward, still keeping the pistol leveled, he drew a square of linen from the other's breast pocket. As he did so, he became conscious of a strange odor in the air. The next instant a dark figure came leaping out of the bank, clutching something in its grip, and approaching them with leaps and bounds. It was Dugan. But as Rob gazed at the approaching fellow a sudden feeling of terrible lassitude overcame him. Dugan, the Jap, the bank, everything, grew hazy. He felt himself falling backward and tried desperately to catch himself. But his effort was a failure. Dropping the pistol from his nerveless fingers, Rob Blake collapsed in a heap on the sidewalk as Dugan came rushing up.

"Ha! An excellent idea to keep Orhsimi, the

Japanese sleeping powder, in my handkerchief; see, honorable Dugan, our young enemy is disposed of."

Stooping by Rob's recumbent form, the Jap picked up the pistol and placed it in his pocket.

"Hark!" exclaimed Dugan, suddenly.

A strange sound was in the air. It was the patter-patter of dozens of young feet. The Boy Scouts, roused by the startling summons of their leader, were coming to the rescue.

"We've got to get out of this, and get out of it quick," exclaimed Dugan, excitedly; "we'll have a whole hornet's nest about our ears if we don't."

"You've got the box with the plans in it?"

"Yes, but the smoke was so confounded thick that I could hardly see to get it."

The last two speeches we have recorded were exchanged while the two rascals were diving down a side street where their automobile was concealed. As the Boy Scouts came pouring round the corner, to be met by a cloud of acrid smoke rolling from the open bank door, there

was a sharp "chug-chug!" as the former soldier and the treacherous Jap made off with their spoil.

"What's the matter? What is it? Who blew the alarm?"

These and a thousand other questions came from the anxious boys as they ran about trying to discover what had happened, and what was the matter. A cry from Merritt summoned them down the street past the bank. The corporal had stumbled over Rob's unconscious form.

"Rob! Rob! What is it?" he was saying as the others came up.

"Somebody must have struck him and left him here," said Tubby. "Fan his face, Merritt."

The corporal produced a handkerchief and vigorously fanned the recumbent lad's countenance. It so happened that in doing this he removed the subtle powder which the crafty Jap had had concealed in his handkerchief, and as its fumes lost their effect Rob awoke. At first he gazed dazedly about him, but presently all that had happened came rushing back to his mind.

"Did they get away?" he asked in a feeble voice.

"Who, old fellow?" asked Tubby, "whom do you mean?"

"Those chaps who robbed the bank."

"Robbed the bank?"

"Yes. I'll explain it all afterward. Did they get away?"

"An auto just chugged off down H street, if that's what you mean," volunteered Hiram.

"Down H street," echoed Rob, "that leads into the New York road, doesn't it?"

"Why, yes," rejoined Merritt, "but what has that to do——"

"Everything," exclaimed Rob, cutting him short; "come on, boys. My dad's car is just up the street. We've got to take after those fellows and have them arrested. They've got valuable papers."

"Rob! They've stolen the airship plans?" gasped Tubby, guessing what had happened.

"That's right. But come on," exclaimed Rob, frantically tugging at his chum's coat-sleeves.

Leaving the others behind with orders to telephone to the various villages about, to apprehend the robbers if they appeared there, the boy, followed by his chums, made for his automobile which, it will be recalled, he had left a short distance up the street. A few turns of the crank and a quick snap as spark and gasoline were turned on, and then a quick dash round the corner into H street and a flying leap down the country road leading into the turnpike to New York!

"Do you think we'll catch them, Rob?" asked Tubby, bending forward eagerly.

"Don't know," was the rejoinder; "we don't even know that they have gone this way. We can only guess at it and hope we are right."

On and on flew the auto through the night, past sleeping villages, through lonely patches of road where dark woods grew right up to the sides of the road, up hills and down steep grades, but still no sight of the auto they were pursuing.

Suddenly, as they topped a small rise, Tubby gave a shout. Below them, and not more than a

quarter of a mile off, they could see the gleam of a tail lamp.

"It's an auto!" exclaimed Merritt, "but is it the right one?"

The boys, except Rob, who was at the wheel, arose to their feet in their excitement as they drew nearer the car ahead, which appeared to be stationary.

All at once, however, the sharp staccato rattle of its exhaust sounded, and the dim lights were whisked off at what seemed considerable speed. Evidently the car had been halted for something—perhaps to examine the stolen box—and the sight of the approaching lights had warned its occupants that these might be signs of a pursuer.

Such was the guess the boys made anyhow, and it was not long before all doubts as to who was in the front car were dissipated.

"Stop that car or I'll fire at you," roared back a voice which the boys recognized as Dugan's.

The only answer they vouchsafed was to keep on going.

Bang!

A bullet screamed past from the car in front and whistled by the boys' ears. They could see the red flash of the discharged pistol against the blackness ahead of them.

"That's to show you we mean business. The next will come closer," came the same voice.

"He's only bluffing. He can't see anything in this light," whispered Tubby.

Suddenly from somewhere to the eastward there came a hoarse, harsh whistle.

"A train!" cried Rob, as he heard; "must be a night freight."

"Reckon that's what it is. This must be the central division of the Long Island Railroad," said Tubby. "Wow, we've come way out of our way."

"They must be off, too," said Rob; "we simply followed our leaders."

"Say, hold on, Rob!" cried Merritt, suddenly; "look! that train's almost at the crossing now!"

"That's right, I just saw the headlight among the trees," echoed Tubby; "better slow down."

"Guess so," assented Rob, as the thunder of the approaching train was borne plainly to their ears. It was evidently, as they had guessed, a night freight, and from the noise the locomotive was making it must have been a big one.

"Woo-oo-oo-ough!"

"There goes the whistle. I guess there are no gates ahead," said Merritt. "Now's our chance to sneak upon those other fellows, they—Gee whiz, look at that!"

As he spoke the other auto, which had hesitated for an instant as the whistle of the approaching train sounded, dashed on ahead.

"They're going to try to beat the train to the crossing," exclaimed Rob.

"They'll never do it," was Merritt's rejoinder. "Look! Oh, good gracious!"

A sound of splintering wood and ripped mechanism drowned his cry of horror, and those of the other lads. Before their very eyes the locomotive had struck the robbers' car as it was half way across the tracks and had tossed it to one side—a mass of kindling wood and twisted metal.

"They must both be injured or killed," cried Rob; "hurry, fellows, maybe we can help."

The boys jumped out of the auto and ran to the crossing. In the meantime the engine had been brought to a standstill and the train crew were examining the wreck. But although both the railroad men and the boys made a thorough search, they could find no trace of the men who had occupied the machine. Rob and Merritt, as a final recourse, walked some distance back up the track, but without finding any evidence that there had been loss of life or injury.

"They must have been thrown clear of the auto when the crash came, and when they picked themselves up I guess they realized that the best thing to do was to take themselves off," was the way Rob explained it. Hardly had he completed this theory of what had occurred when his foot struck something. It gave out a metallic ring. Stooping down swiftly, he picked it up and found that it was the tin box from the bank, battered and dented, indeed, but intact and still locked.

Naturally the boys were delighted over their

find, which must have been thrown from the auto when it was demolished. As after half an hour more of searching nothing was to be found of Dugan or the Jap, the train crew went back to their train and the boys prepared to turn back, with what pleasant anticipations may be imagined.

"Well, so long, kids," shouted the conductor of the train after the long line of cars rolled off, "too lucky to happen a second time, I'm thinking."

Of course, he referred to the fact that no loss of life or injury had occurred in the smash-up, but to the boys his words had an added meaning.

"It is too lucky to happen a second time," said Rob, hugging the precious tin box.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A BOLT FROM THE BLUE.

ROB woke late the next day. For a few minutes it seemed to him that he must have dreamed all that had occurred the night before, but Lieutenant Duvall's voice from the room below speedily undeceived him. He recalled it all now—how his father and an astonished crowd of townsfolk had met them on their return from that wild auto ride; how, on the box being opened, it had been found to contain the plans of the highly valued invention, of the exclusive possession of which Japan had been so anxious to deprive the United States.

"Rob, are you awake," came his father's voice up the stairway.

"Yes, and I'm ashamed of myself for sleeping so late," was the lad's rejoinder. "Gee whiz, half-past nine! I'll be down in ten minutes."

The lad was bathed and dressed in record time.

and in a few minutes over the promised time made his appearance in the living-room. Lieutenant Duvall rose and greeted him warmly, as he came in. He overwhelmed the boy with his thanks and congratulations.

"It was a fine act—a splendid thing to do," he said, enthusiastically. "Mr. Blake, you certainly ought to be proud of such a boy. Rob, I have sent a telegram to Washington to-day. Won't you come out to the experiment station with me and watch some flights while we wait for an answer?" Then seeing the puzzled look on Rob's face, he broke into a smile.

"You see," he said, "the telegram concerns you and your plucky young chums. The Department will not pass such bravery by without taking official notice of it."

Rob colored with pleasure as he accepted the invitation. After a hasty breakfast they set out in the officer's auto. On the way Merritt and Tubby were called for, and it was a happy party that went spinning over the road toward the old mansion. The air was clear and still, the

sea smooth and sparkling under a cloudless sky, and in the atmosphere was the promise of summer.

"A perfect day for flights," said the lieutenant, "and a perfect day to try a few bomb-dropping experiments."

"Then you haven't blown up the old Vesper yet?" said Rob.

"No. She holds together as if she were built of steel instead of wood. I tell you what, we ought to make this day a memorable one; I've got an idea in that direction."

"What is it?" inquired Rob, watching the officer's twinkling eyes.

"Well, you know, the French claim that the Englishman is wont to remark, 'By Jove, a fine day; let's go out and kill something.' Now, I am going to parody that and say, 'It's a fine day, let's blow up something!'"

"Blow up the Vesper," cried Tubby.

"That's it. If we can hit her. I've a notion to try it myself. By Jove, I will," went on the officer, warming to his subject. "I want badly to

try out a new cordite bomb we've been making this winter, and here's my chance."

"Good-bye, old Vesper," breathed Rob, tragically, extending his arm in the direction in which the two melancholy-looking bare masts of the schooner could be seen looming up.

"Don't say good-bye yet," chuckled the officer; "I might miss her."

The War Department had lost no time in replying to Lieutenant Duvall's message describing the boys' courage and enterprise in securing the papers stolen from the shattered safe. It was brought to the officer by an orderly almost as soon as they reached the De Regny place.

"Shall I read it out?" asked the officer, with a smile. "It'll make your ears burn."

The boys began to protest, much to the amusement of several officers gathered in what had once been the dining room of the old mansion, but Lieutenant Duvall nevertheless read in a loud, clear voice the following:

"You are instructed to thank lads mentioned in dispatch on behalf of the Secretary of War.

Splendid work. More substantial reward (the Special Honor Medal) will follow. Hills, secretary to the Secretary of War."

"Wow!" breathed Tubby, and then turned very red as a perfect gale of laughter followed his sincere expression of amazement, gratitude and delight—all rolled into one.

"It's wonderful," breathed Rob.

"I can hardly believe it," echoed Merritt, giving himself a surreptitious pinch.

"Now, then, to lunch," laughed the lieutenant, "and after that, good-bye to the Vesper."

"Good-bye to the Vesper," echoed his brother officers, who knew of the program for the afternoon.

* * * * *

It was about two-thirty o'clock, and the sea was unrippled except for the lazy Atlantic heave, when a small launch left Hampton Harbor and sped eastward through the Inlet and then out into the open sea. She rapidly skirted the coast and it was not long before the little craft was past Topsail Island, and on the left hand of her

four occupants, the dark trees surrounding the De Regny mansion were visible.

Seaward from the desolate looking place, above which, however, the stars and stripes floated with a bright dash of color, could be seen the two bare masts of the wreck, and this was apparently the objective point of the small launch, for as they neared her one of the men in her stern-seat half rose and, pointing, said:

"There she is now. In half an hour we'll know if Hank was telling the truth."

"How was he this morning when you called up the hospital?" asked Bill Bender of the first speaker, who was Stonington Hunt.

The other shook his head.

"Bad," he said; "I'll tell you what it is," he added with a crafty look in his eyes; "if we find this money we don't need to tell Hank anything about it. We'll just split it among ourselves. He'll never leave that bed in the hospital, and it's just as well for us he won't."

"Hold on there a minute, Mr. Hunt," said Bill Bender; "I won't consent to that. Hank was

pretty square with us and we'll be square with him. He'll get his share of the money if it's there."

"Don't be foolish," remonstrated Stonington Hunt, in his smooth, crafty voice; "he cannot use it and we can. I tell you——"

"Look! Look!" interrupted Freeman Hunt, the youngest member of the party, who had been sitting forward; "what's that over there by the mansion? See, it's rising into the air!"

"It's an aeroplane!" burst out his father; "bother it all, I hope they don't come flying out this way."

"They're a nuisance," agreed Jack Curtiss, watching like the others the graceful evolutions of the white-winged flying machine as it rose from amid the dark trees and began to circle about like a gliding hawk.

All at once it made a lofty sweep and then started off in a straight line toward the Vesper.

"Look, she's coming out to sea!" cried Freeman, delightedly, lost in admiration. "Say, she's a dandy."

"Why, the thing can fly," admitted his father, grudgingly, "and—and—why, what's that fellow in her doing? He's unfastening something. A black object that is hanging down under the seat. It's a round thing. It looks like—like—a *bomb*! Great Scott! He's going to blow the Vesper up."

"Rot!" sneered Jack Curtiss, but his face was very pale. As for Bill Bender and Freeman Hunt, they said nothing, but watched the aeroplane soaring far above them with open mouths and staring eyes.

"Shout to him! Call to him!" raved Stonington Hunt. "Tell him there is money on board her. Don't let him blow that schooner up. Hey-y-y-y-y!"

The distracted man, crazed by the thought of being cheated out of his golden prey at the last minute, stood erect in the boat and waved his arms frantically, but if the figure guiding the flying machine even saw him it gave no sign.

Now the aeroplane was right above the Vesper. The fascinated watchers in the boat could see the flying man's arm move. Then, like a

tiny shoe button—a little black shoe button—something dropped from the big, white airship.

“Gone! Gone!” almost shrieked Stonington Hunt, as he saw.

“Shut up, can’t you?” growled Jack Curtiss, his eyes, like those of the others, fixed upon the falling black sphere.

“Maybe it’s not a real bomb, just a practice one, and——” began Bill Bender, hopefully, when there came a shock through the air that threatened to drive their ear drums in. Sea and sky seemed to rock. Before their startled sight the old wreck rose above the surface of the water as if a giant hand had impelled her, and then settled back as slowly as a harpooned whale. The next instant an immense cloud of vapor arose and swelled to a waving, yellowish pillar in the still air. At the same moment, a mighty reverberating “boom” reached their ears. Above the destruction it had wrought the aeroplane wheeled like a phoenix.

As they gazed, its occupant waved his hand. To Stonington Hunt it seemed that it was a

mocking gesture. He fairly snarled, drawing back his lips till his teeth were exposed like a wolf's.

"Beaten again, and by blind fate, too!" he raved, tearing his hair in his extravagant fury and doing all manner of frenzied things. Even Jack Curtiss and Bill Bender were disgusted at his exhibition of childish rage, and sternly told him to control himself.

As a sort of forlorn hope the launch was run up close to where the Vesper had been last seen, but nothing remained of her but a few timbers floating around on the surface. Some of them were blackened and splintered where the cordite had riven them. The well-aimed bomb had done its work well. The hunters for Hank's secreted loot were cheated of their treasure trove by the strangest combination of circumstances that ever frustrated a knavish plot.

But Stonington Hunt had, as he had remarked, still a trump card to play. And when the next day it came to his ears that the Boy Scouts had been present at the destruction of the Vesper he

was more determined than ever to use it. Going to a small safe in his room, he drew from it certain papers, armed with which, he started for Paul Perkins's place. He found Mrs. Perkins sweeping the front steps and greeted her with a low bow and a flourish of his hat. Mrs. Perkins feared and disliked Stonington Hunt, and would have avoided him if she could, but before she could say anything the man had pushed through the gate and was beside her.

"Good morning, Mrs. Perkins," he said, with great effusiveness; "I have called to give Paul one last chance to sell me the rights in that machine of his."

"He won't do it, I'm sure, sir. There is no use your bothering," said Mrs. Perkins. "He—oh, here he comes now," as Paul came round the corner of the house; "Paul, here's Mr. Hunt."

"Oh," said Paul, with no very noticeable cordiality in his tones.

"Yes, I've come to see if you are prepared to sell the machine to me now," said Hunt, with an odd ring in his voice.

"I cannot, as I told you before," said Paul, firmly. "I have my reasons, and——"

"I have mine," snapped Hunt, a savage light appearing in his eyes. He whipped a hand into his breast pocket and produced a handful of papers.

"Mrs. Perkins," he demanded, "are you prepared to pay me the interest on this mortgage? It amounts to \$1,500."

"Why—why," stammered Mrs. Perkins, "you have no mortgage on this house. It's Landis, the real estate man. He——"

"I bought the mortgage from him, madam," was the rejoinder, "and I am now here to claim my property unless the interest is paid up at once. Of course, I am willing to take the sole rights to that machine in lieu of the interest. I think I'm giving you a good chance; are you willing to take it?"

"I suppose I must," hesitated Mrs. Perkins; "oh, dear, this is dreadful. Paul, my boy, will you——"

But Paul had vanished mysteriously some minutes before.

"I don't know what to do, sir," she stammered, almost weeping, "I cannot pay the mortgage now. Will you not wait?"

"Not another day, madam——"

"You don't need to," came a quiet voice from behind them. It was Paul. With him were the three Boy Scouts.

"I'll pay off that mortgage now, Mr. Hunt," he went on as Rob, Tubby and Merritt broke into broad smiles at the expression of baffled fury on Hunt's face.

"Why—what—I don't——" he began.

"You don't need to," said Paul. "Mother, we are rich. Mr. Merrill has disposed of the Motor-Scooter idea to the government. He sent me a check for five thousand dollars yesterday."

"Oh, Paul, you never told me!" cried his mother.

"I didn't want to till I could be sure I wasn't dreaming," laughed Paul, happily. "Now, then, Mr. Hunt, how much is that mortgage for, and

we'll go before a notary and I'll pay it up—every penny."

Hunt's hands quivered so that he could hardly control them. In his agitation and rage he let fall to the ground one of his papers. It was Tubby who picked it up. On it Mr. Hunt's not overclean thumb had left a large imprint. The fat boy's eyes lit up as he gazed at it.

"Give that paper back, you young whipper-snapper!" demanded Stonington Hunt.

"Not till I've compared it with something else," was the quiet rejoinder.

And very leisurely Tubby drew from his pocket something wrapped in paper. This, on being uncovered, proved to be a bit of wood smelling strongly of kerosene.

The rotund youth compared the thumb-print on the papers and the one upon the bit of wood with quiet deliberation, while the others looked breathlessly on. They could not imagine what was coming. Stonington Hunt could, though, for his face was pale and the sweat stood on his brow in shiny beads.

"Are you going to give that paper back?" he demanded in a hoarse voice.

"Yes, when I've got a warrant for your arrest for setting fire to Paul Perkins's wagon-house," was the quiet rejoinder.

"Why—I—you—what do you mean?" exclaimed Hunt, but his eyes were wild and staring and he seemed about to fall to the ground.

"I mean that the thumb-print on this bit of oil-soaked wood and your thumb-print on this paper are the same," declared Tubby. "If you don't think so, we'll go to the magistrate and let him decide."

"Oh, no! Oh, no! Mercy!" howled Stonington Hunt, suddenly losing all his bravado and sinking on his knees. "Be merciful. Don't prosecute me."

"Be quiet and listen," said Tubby, in the same judicial voice, while his companions gazed on, amazed at the stern expression of the ordinarily careless, good-natured lad's tones.

"Will you tear up that mortgage?"

"Yes, oh, yes! Give it to me and you will see."

"Not so fast," said Tubby, tearing off the bit of paper with the thumb print on it; "I need this. Now, then, tear the rest up."

"You won't prosecute if I do?" wailed the groveling wretch.

"No," promised Paul; "we've no wish to be hard on you, badly as you have treated us."

Hunt, with trembling hands, tore the paper into tiny shreds.

"You'd better burn those," said Tubby, turning to Paul. "Now, then, Mr. Hunt, you had better get out of here," he went on to the unmasked rascal. "Do you understand?"

"Yes, and thank you," rejoined the humbled, quaking man in a trembling tone. He started for the gate. As he reached it a boyish figure came swinging along the street; it was Freeman Hunt.

"Why, hullo, dad," he said, as he stopped, disdaining to notice the boys; "how ill you look. What's the matter?"

"Nothing, my boy. Perhaps the sun is a little warm," was the reply. "I have a headache."

"Well, you'd better come up to the house. Sister is starting for Maine to visit those friends this afternoon. She wants to say good-bye to you."

"I will, my boy, and, Freeman, while I think of it, we may as well pack up and go, too. The climate of Hampton does not agree with me."

* * * * *

Well, the tale is told. That little trip of Stonington Hunt's extended into weeks, and the weeks into months, and he never came back. Finally his house was sold and the place knew him no more. In the meantime, affairs at Hampton had been progressing much in the usual way. Paul, in due course, received his other five thousand dollars, which was deposited in the bank, the institution having been completely remodeled in the course of repairing the damage wrought by the blowing up of the big safe. And of the part the Motor-Scooter played in the conquest of the Pole, the papers have told.

Nothing more was ever heard of Dugan or the Japanese, although it was said some time

ago in a Tokio dispatch that an American named Dugan had been shot in a quarrel with one of the Mikado's officers. As for Hank Handcraft, he recovered from his lingering illness and was discharged from the hospital, a wreck of the man he had been. On leaving the place he declared his intention of going to see some relatives in England and of spending the remainder of his days there, but whether he did so, or from whom he procured the funds for the trip, the present writer is not informed.

Perhaps some of my readers would like to know what became of Sim. Well, Sim has a job doing odd tasks for Cap. Hudgins out on Topsail Island. Previous to undertaking these duties for the good-hearted captain Sim had another job, but he did not hold it long.

His employer, a well-to-do man in the town, met Sim the first morning he came to work and thereafter did not see him for two whole days. Finally Sim was discovered asleep in the barn on a soft truss of hay.

"Say, have you been sleeping ever since I hired you?" asked Sim's new employer indignantly.

"I do not come, sir, of a hard-working race," rejoined Sim, still with his old habit strong upon him; "your 'ad' said, 'Boy wanted to sleep on the place.'"

One afternoon in early June there were unwonted doings in Hampton. The annual Firemen's Carnival was on, with a parade of Boy Scouts as a special feature. Big crowds lined the streets on foot, in buggies and in autos to see the big parade pass under the flaunting banners and decorations.

The cheers were loud and long for the firemen of the different villages as they swung by with their equipment, but presently a shout went down the line of spectators:

"Here come the Boy Scouts!"

What a shout arose then! The others sounded no louder than a pop-gun beside a cannon, compared to it. Headed by a band playing a lively quick-step the serried ranks of bright young faces and well set-up figures went swinging by, keeping

perfect step. At the head of the Eagle division, with its green and black standard, came our young friends. On the breast of each, besides their Red Honors, glittered three brand new gold medals, the gift of the War Department.

"The Boy Scouts' organization surely is a fine thing for those youngsters," remarked Lieutenant Duvall to Mr. Blake, as the two stood outside the bank and watched the spectacle.

"It is, indeed," agreed Mr. Blake. "It is going to make good men of them, too," he added.

And here, with the blare of martial music in our ears and before our eyes the sight of row upon row of orderly, nattily-uniformed boys swinging by to the lively air of "The Boy Scouts' March," we will for the present take leave of our friends of the Eagle Patrol, to resume their acquaintance in another volume of this series, in which their further adventures and exciting doings will be related in full. This volume I shall call, "THE BOY SCOUTS' MOUNTAIN CAMP."

THE END.

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